

NO.2

AUTOTOPSY



REEFER MADNESS!

PILL-POPPING PSYCHOSI

HERE COME THE LIZARDS!

DRY MOUTH SYNDROME!

HOW TO SPELL 'BHONG'!

HIGH ON NANOBOTS!

I WAS A TEENAGE CRACKHEAD!

*HEADF*CK!*

MUSHROOMS

SHINY!



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Autopsy* Issue 2.

This issue we tackle our next controversial and difficult subject.

Drugs.

Like it or not drugs are a massive part of modern culture, especially if you include cigarettes and alcohol which are, after all, the 'acceptable' face of narcotics. Sometimes it seems like everyone is at it, especially in regard to marijuana which is as, if not more, common than smoking regular cigarettes amongst whole portions of the population. Dance culture is intertwined with a veritable cocktail of chemical substances that many feel are 'needed' to appreciate the finer points of the music or just to make a good night out. Legal and illegal drugs of all sorts are used just to get people through the day and offset the stress of modern living, yes, even caffeine.

From a gaming standpoint drugs are often ignored entirely or are treated as entirely bad either through lack of knowledge on the part of the writer or because they don't want to be accused of promoting drug use. Most people I think are mature enough to know that nothing is black-and-white but after the Pat Pulling problems of the 80s gamers can be justifiably wary.

A step of removal from real-life allows some explanations and uses of drugs. Science Fiction games often use them as a MacGuffin or a justification for psionic powers or other strangeness. Cyberpunk games give us a smorgasbord of new and interestingly named substances and even rules for addiction and the positive effects of drugs but these often lack impact or don't relate the true social impact of such substances. Fantasy games always seem to almost entirely ignore the concept, perhaps because such things weren't especially enforced in medieval society though alcohol smuggling occurred later on over duties and town drunks are a staple of many kinds of fiction.

The agenda here will not be to warn people away from drugs, to preserve the image of the 'industry' from attack or even to educate about drugs. This will be a neutral standpoint and a discussion on how drugs and their implications can be incorporated into different settings.

There are political and social implications that knock on from drugs, questions of legality versus prohibition, how societies tackle the presence of narcotics and the effects they can have on human behaviour as well as technological, military and other applications. As much as possible I will try to present the political and social issues in a neutral voice but my sympathies are with liberal and left-leaning thought on these issues and it may bleed through into what I write, feel free to adapt to your own political assertions.

On a more personal note *Bloodsucker: The Angst* is now out for anyone who thinks certain vampire games and certain companies may have gotten a little overblown or who enjoy making fun of other Goths and alt-culture types (mostly people of that sort themselves). The various *Feast of Crows* army books are all out, as is *@ctiv8* and '45 should be out in time for *Dragonmeet* in December where I shall be, hopefully with some hardcopies of many of my books and *Hentacle's* expansion packs.

Some of my work for *SLA Industries* should also be out at *Dragonmeet* which is yet another reason you should attend if you can. Other than that the deal for a professional version of *Hentacle* carries on slowly but steadily and I have made a deal with a French group for a translation and re-imagining of *Cloak of Steel* to go ahead in French. I am also working on a partnership deal with an artist regarding a card and deck based role-playing game. Hopefully some PoD group somewhere will cover cardgames by the time we're done!

Next year I hope to concentrate more on my freelancing again and less on my own products, but we'll have to wait and see what occurs.

Cheers.

GRIM

PS. I'm always looking for freelance work and partnership opportunities so gizza job!

PPS. I'll be at *Dragonmeet* in London in December. Drop by and say hello.

INFORMATION BOX

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Postmortem Studios

Role-playing Games to *DIE* for.

WHAT IS A DRUG?

Drug

n.

1.
 - a) *A substance used in the diagnosis, treatment, or prevention of a disease or as a component of a medication.*
 - b) *Such a substance as recognized or defined by the U.S. Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.*
2. *A chemical substance, such as a narcotic or hallucinogen, that affects the central nervous system, causing changes in behavior and often addiction.*
3. *Obsolete. A chemical or dye.*

Drugs are chemical compounds that can have a profound impact on the human body and mind. In a more general sense drugs cover all manner of chemicals that we ingest to stop pain, treat illnesses or induce a bit more chemical balance into the human mind. In this context however we're talking, for the most part, about recreational drugs. Those drugs are taken for many reasons but most often for the experience, for artistic or spiritual reasons, because it's the done thing or because a person is addicted.

When it comes to gaming we want to know the effect the drug will have upon our characters – both positive and negative – their chance of addiction and, also, its social context. How does the drug fit into the fantasy society of the game, what are the prevailing views towards it, is it legal or illegal for example? Why is it legal or illegal and how does that impact on the world around it?

It is very hard to get straight answers on drugs from most sources. Those most interested in giving you information are biased one way or the other. Alcohol companies want you to believe that a little booze is healthy, that alcoholism isn't a huge problem and that their products are safe. Tobacco companies want to downplay the problems with smoking and governments, while they issue warnings, tax these commodities and make a pretty penny from them. At the same time governments are trying to crack down on illegal drugs that are deemed dangerous to both individual and society so the information from law-enforcement and anti-drug campaigns tends to be extremely biased, playing up the risks as much as possible. You can almost never get the 'straight dope' – to coin a phrase – on drugs.

I have my own, anecdotal evidence on this score. Around ten years ago there was a bit of a push to give accurate information on drugs and their level of risk to teenagers in the school and college brackets, 13-18 years of age. This had been quite successful in The North and was now going to be tried in The South (of England). I did cartoons for a series of leaflets that went out in the mid 90s, giving kids the most accurate information possible so that they could make their own decisions. Evidence at the time suggested that since so many were trying soft drugs and coming to little or no harm, they were distrusting the negative messages about harder, more debilitating drugs and so treating them the same way.

We were eventually stopped as it was deemed that giving the more accurate information almost counted as promoting them and a harder line was readopted, unfortunately.

LEGAL DRUGS

Legal drugs are, generally, legal for one of three reasons. Firstly they have some medical use – apart from any recreational misuses they are put to. Secondly – nobody has gotten around to making them illegal yet. Thirdly – They have been legal in the past and the tax revenue and trouble required to make them illegal isn't judged to be worth it.

The first kind are, most often, tranquilisers or psychiatric drugs with some of them, notably ketamine, coming from the veterinary world. While these drugs are legal, some of them are sourced from drugs that we associate with illegality. Opiates form a large selection of the high end painkillers, whether artificial or natural and come from the same source as heroin. Medical grade marijuana is grown in some places for testing on other forms of pain relief. LSD was once heralded as a psychiatric breakthrough drug. Others are less interesting or exciting but get their use through unconventional uses, such as melting and injecting what is supposed to be taken orally.

In a science fiction or fantasy setting there may be wide variance in the effect that a substance has on one species over another. Something used as a medicine by elves might be a narcotic to humans and a poison to dwarves. This can be a good source of conflict, smuggling and other similar stories as a medicine needed by one people is seen as a bane by two others.

Even with legal drugs people will find a way to misuse or abuse them from binge drinking to faking prescriptions for tranquilisers or anti-depressants.

The second kind represent a fairly new problem with even illegal drugs labs – due to advances in technology – being able to turn out variations on a theme or to develop new synthetic substances at a faster rate than the legal system and the bureaucracy can ban them. These tend to be variations on a theme with the same sort of effect but different strengths and nuances and tend to be more rooted in dance culture than anywhere else, though so-called 'smart drugs' may also appear within this area.

The third kind describes your cigarettes and your alcohol. These are long established and hard to root out intoxicants from which governments derive tax revenue and from which companies make a great deal of money – giving them a powerful lobbying fund.

Removing such deeply entrenched 'drug' use and culture from a society is virtually impossible – witness the failure of the prohibition era in the US and the crime associated with it. This has lead many to advocate the broad legalisation – including regulation and tax – of all narcotics. This will be gone into in more detail later on.

Another good, general, hook for a game could be the banning of a previously legal substance in an area. The period of change, the smuggling opportunities to supply those who still desire whatever it is being banned or the task to stop said smuggling, the upheaval in the culture and the knock on effects of the ban all make for engaging roleplay that almost writes itself.

ILLEGAL DRUGS

What makes an illegal drug illegal doesn't seem to be clear. Synthetic or natural, harmful or not there are certain chemical compounds that governments deem to be dangerous in some manner so that they must be controlled though there seems to be little in the way of commonality between these substances. The more widespread the use of the drug, the longer it has been used and the less harm it does, in general, the more likely it is to be legal. The smaller the user-base, the newer the drug and the more harm it does to more likely it is to be illegal, especially if its use is exclusively, or almost exclusively, recreational.

The starkest contrast is most likely between tobacco and magic mushrooms. Tobacco is a legal drug, immensely addictive and highly carcinogenic, taxed by the government and used recreationally as it has been since it was discovered and returned to Europe (though other things were smoked previous to it). Magic mushrooms are an illegal drug and, about the worst thing they can find to say about them is that you might pick the wrong type and poison yourself.

Existing outside the realms of legitimate business there is no taxation or control on the production of illegal drugs and many of them are produced, or smuggled, in circumstances that are less than hygienic. Product can become tainted during production or distribution and, particularly in the case of complex synthetic drugs; this can cause unpredictable side effects.

Illegal drugs are the cornerstone of most organised criminal efforts. They earn a great deal of money, can be leveraged to encourage loyalty and build their own customer base – in many cases – through addiction. The amount of money the sales produce, whether it be illegal bourbon during prohibition or hundreds of ecstasy tablets today, gives the criminals a great deal of clout and a great deal of bribery capability which they can use to hire good lawyers and to 'grease' the wheels here and there, making high level criminals relatively insulated against prosecution.

Illegal drugs are divided in different ways in different countries but most will recognise and understand the division in classification between 'soft drugs' and 'hard drugs'. With the hard drugs tending to have the more profound impact on the user, in terms of health, effect and addiction, and with soft drugs having a lesser effect and being treated less seriously – generally – by the authorities.

Government responses to the presence of illegal drugs varies massively according to the regime involved from death sentences to the most minor offences all the way through to legalisation in either name or lack of enforcement. In Amsterdam you can buy marijuana and mushrooms in the coffee shops while in some other nations you can be publicly beaten or hung for having the same.

The income from illegal drugs can also operate at a much more macro scale, shoring up the economies of whole nations – albeit through the black market and under the counter. With so-called cash crops being produced for a pittance it is a temptation in many nations, particularly those in a state of civil strife – for the farmers to produce narcotics rather than coffee or some other legitimate product.

Illegal drugs have massive financial, criminal, social and personal impact by their sheer presence.

UNUSUAL DRUGS

There is a whole meta-level of theoretical and unusual effects that aim to replicate or replace the effect of drugs through various non-chemical methods. These include everything from sensory deprivation tanks to virtual reality rigs to powerful electromagnets that can be used to induce strange psychedelic visions in the subject.

In the future this is likely to only get stranger. Even before nano-machines become possible nano-delivery systems will allow for much more precise and targeted chemical delivery systems, likely allowing for far more specific chemical effects. Brain-machine interface may allow for simulated trips and more and more complex understanding of the processes of the human body and brain will allow for even more peculiar head-trips.

Imagine the possibilities of a psychedelic 'plague' or nanobot swarm used as a weapon to incapacitate a planet or ship for invasion. Roleplaying the defenders in such an instance, struggling to overcome their hallucinations to do their job effectively could provide a challenge and such a weapon could be smuggled into an area under the pretence of being the latest fun substance.

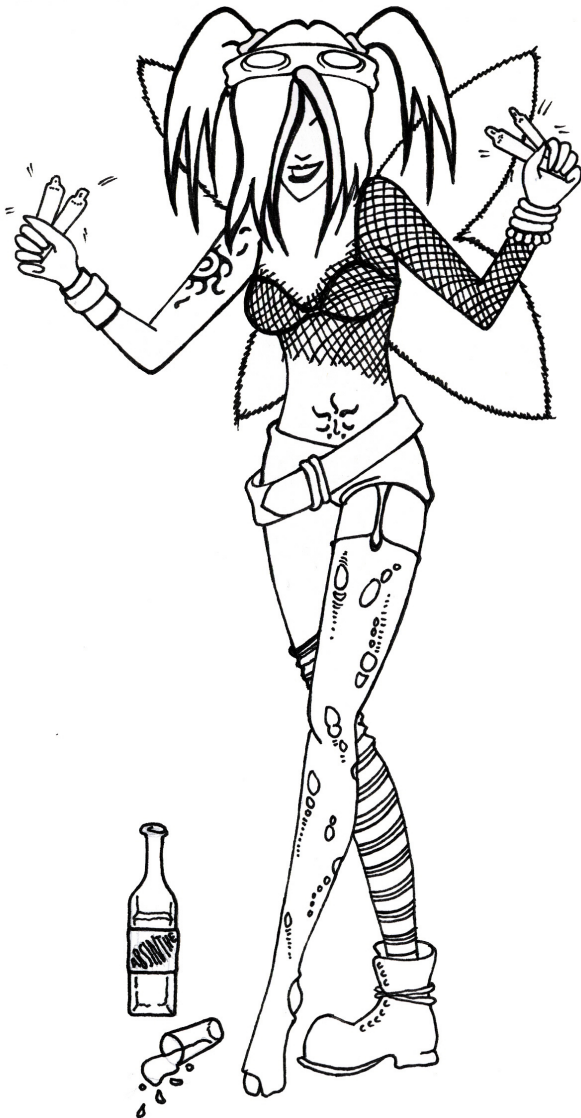
There will likely come around new substances, methods and delivery systems giving us whole new ways to get out of our skulls that we can't even comprehend yet, not to mention greater accessibility of the technology that can be used to produce complex chemicals becoming even more accessible. It is not impossible to see a vision of a chemical 'hacker' culture similar to the bedroom coder phenomenon in computing with apartment labs turning out a new flavour of head-fuck every weekend.

An interesting twist might be to set a game in the period just prior to the legalisation of a drug with all the former crimelords fighting it out for supremacy in the last few weeks or months before they 'go legit'. This is their last bash at using underhanded and illegal tactics before they emerge into the, potentially, larger profits of real business. Of course, this can continue afterwards if they have trouble 'adjusting' to the legitimate way of doing things.

A cyberpunk or dystopian game could be based around a producer of such 'edge' drugs. A technically legal enterprise constantly skirting the edge between arrest and fortune acquiring technology and ideas and peddling the latest wares to the club crowd, selling off the plans to the cartels and producers once the law catches on to what is going on.

Viruses and bacteria could also, potentially, be engineered so that you get 'infected' with your high while the living organism acts as a payload delivery system for the effects of the drug – a living infectious high that you actively seek contracting.

Turning to possibilities in fantasy and science fiction settings magic and alchemy could be used to enhance the effects of normal – or fantastical – drugs, certain monsters or creatures could be valued for their venom or the effects of their excretions or psionic effects could be enhanced by, or replace the effects of normal drugs. The only bounds of the fantastic drugs are the imaginations of those who come up with them – though the temptation is always to lapse into stereotype or to exaggerate when making up one's own effects.



THE TABOO OF DRUGS DRUGS AS THEY WERE

Chemical abuse was not always the subject of derision, hatred and disapproval. Indeed the use of drugs, particularly psychedelics of various sorts, was an integral part of many cultures historically and is interwoven with tribal cultures, and others, to this day. These chemicals were part of a sacrament to one's god or spirit, a way of getting in touch with the mystical 'godhead' and of acquiring wisdom from the spirits or other manifestations of deity. To this day Rastafari venerate and use marijuana, Native American groups use peyote and this can even be construed as part of the power of wine as a symbol at Christian communion.

Even in more modern times the use of drugs has been left to personal responsibility and those things that are considered dangerous narcotics these days were once indulged in fairly freely, even considered to be medicines or health tonics, even in the face of fairly strong disapproval from polite society. Opium, genuine absinthe, cannabis, cocaine and others were all available freely – sometimes even more freely than alcohol – and have all come to be associated with various artistic, musical or literary movements or individuals. This link between drugs and art continues to the more modern era, even in the face of illegality.

In games of magic, particularly modern magic, the link between drugs and spirituality is a particularly interesting one to follow. These experiences are often key, especially to shamanic traditions and, in games of modern magic which often include conspiracy, the emphasis of government on banning and controlling substances can be taken to show that they are 'in the know' about their mystical capabilities and that that is why they want to suppress them.

For the gamer it is interesting to reflect on the use of drugs in the past – as well as the potential use of them in the future – as ways to address how they may come to be used in fantasy or futuristic societies. The link between drugs and the 'soul' – for want of a better word – is undeniable. Drugs are consistently linked with intuition, art and spirituality. For fantasy games the religious aspect and the possibilities if these 'communion' were real give a good focus while futuristic games might experiment with alien aboriginal cultures or a resurgence of tolerance and the effects that might have on a society.



DRUGS AS THEY ARE

Drugs today, even while some find medicinal use under other names, are – in the case of recreational use – almost universally condemned and banned. As such, despite their continued association with spirituality and art, they continue to be pushed underground and into the criminal arena. Most interactions with drugs are, therefore, tinged with the frisson of risk. While some concessions are, occasionally, made for those whose use is connected with their religion and further concessions are sometimes made for the softer drugs for most, simply using is enough to put them at potential loggerheads with the government and law enforcement.

Widespread drug use is, most often, tied into leisure activity, particularly the music and associated dance scene with many pills and other chemicals almost ‘required’ for a good night out in many places. Harder drugs may be tried as an experiment, become habitual and then become a lifestyle though they are less often associated with a social scene.

Drugs can also be a demonstration of power and wealth despite their image and association with poverty in many cases. Cocaine in particular has become associated with the wealthy elite in business, fashion and film just as much as martinis and fast cars, a habit to support an accessory like the car, the Armani suit or a Rolex watch.

It is a stereotype of nobility, be they corporate CEOs, feudal barons or French monarchs, that they are decadent and jaded. These people can have anything they want and so their tastes turn to the rare, the forbidden and the hellishly expensive. Narcotics may be no exception and there can be ample opportunity for adventure supplying that need or being contracted to supply a specific need. Whatever the setting.

For the softer drugs there are many movements for decriminalisation or legalisation – reasoning that the softer end of drugs are relatively harmless and no more harmful than alcohol or cigarettes and that they would be safer still if legal and removed from the criminal market. Even with the harder substances there are movements to try and legalise and control them in order to guarantee purity of supply, to cut off the source of funding from the criminal element and to supply medical options to those who suffer from addiction.

Of late this gradual swing towards liberalisation has turned back around the other way with more conservative and enforcement based options coming back up in popularity even in more liberal, mainland European countries and slowly coming closer to matching more conservative US opinion and tactics against drugs; how far this backswing will continue remains to be seen.

HEALTH CONCERNS

One of the major prongs of the anti-drugs movement is the effect that assorted narcotics have on the body. Even though some are used as medicine these uses are carefully controlled and used to treat greater ills, as well as being unadulterated and pure examples of the substance. By contrast, recreational use of drugs in unmonitored and uncontrolled and criminally acquired substances may be impure and cut with dangerous substances (or too pure and thusly too strong for the addict taking them). Even the way some narcotics are shipped can have an adverse effect on health, especially if hidden in diesel or amongst other hazardous chemicals to deter searching.

Anything taken in too great quantities can be bad for the human body, even vitamins and minerals. Narcotics are no exception even if that harm can be slight in each individual case of use, the damage is cumulative. With just about every drug it is a matter of what the user considers ‘acceptable harm’, metered by the fact that addiction can occur and remove the decision to continue taking the drug from being one of conscious choice.

DRUG EFFECTS

Drugs have many and varied effects but they all interact in some fashion with the chemistry of the body or brain. They can stimulate or suppress certain processes in the body, interfere with perception, sleep patterns, energy, appetite and any number of effects. When influencing brain chemistry they can heighten senses, change mood, create euphoria and through these influence behaviour.

All of these effects put strain – either physical or mental – upon the body and coming out of the effect of the drug, ‘coming down’ or ‘crashing’ after its use can be quite hard. We’re all familiar with the effects of a hangover from alcohol but the effects from other substances can be even stronger from energy to exhaustion, from euphoria to crushing depression. Over time this strain can be telling upon the body causing breakdowns, weakness and illness. Similarly the psychological effects can be unpredictable especially in those who already have mental problems or a susceptibility to them.

ADDICTION

Addiction to substances comes in two forms, psychological and physical.

A psychological dependency is when you become convinced that you need a substance in order to function, when the perceptions and state of mind offered by the drug become preferable to the reality of a clear head. The phrase to ‘drink to forget’ would be a good example of this, even though alcohol can become physically addictive. Similarly people can convince themselves that they need a spliff every morning to get their ‘head right’ or any number of substances that they feel they need to use to take the edge off a normal level of stress.

Physical addiction, on the other hand, creates a physical dependency – and often tolerance for – a drug. Without it the user goes into a period of ‘withdrawal’; an often tortuous process with a deep seated craving for the drug and feeling far worse than they ever would ‘straight’. In most cases this dependency and tolerance stems from the brain naturally trying to balance out the amount of stimulation it is getting from the drug, lessening the effect it has and thus requiring more of the drug, creating a feedback loop. In some cases the damage done can be particularly severe and long term, making it harder for the user to get pleasure or good feelings in any fashion, even with their original drug of choice. This is also why more and more drug can be required to have the same effect as the body and brain become ‘trained’ into dealing with it.

Addiction is broken through abstinence and willpower but, with physically addictive substances, it can be best to slowly wean the addict off the substance to cushion the blow and the shock to the body. This is why treatment of heroin addiction is usually done through progressively milder substitutes and why courses of anti-depressants usually entail a period of reduced dosage before coming off them.

LOSS

A great deal of the fear of drugs comes from the theme of loss; the idea that by taking the substance one is putting at risk several factors that make a person who they are. The thought of being ‘out of control’ or putting one’s sense of ‘self’ at risk is horrifying to many people and a risk or harm they would seek to spare happening to others – even if they seek it.

LOSS OF CONTROL

The first form of loss is the loss of control, though this can take many forms. Drugs can put you to sleep, or into a trance-like state, they can remove your inhibitions, alter your personality or make you see – and react to – things that are not there.

While the ‘kid takes acid and jumps off a building’ stories are apocryphal people can act strangely, harm themselves, property, or others while affected by hallucinogenics. Other drugs can similarly effect the mental state, remove inhibitions and even cause periods where you are blacked out and remember nothing of what you have been doing while under strong influence of the drug – alcohol in particular is notorious for this. Even more embarrassing drugs can cause the loss of control of bodily functions leading to heavy users wetting or fouling themselves.

Some of these effects reflect why these chemicals are used upon the unwilling. Quite apart from the controlling influence of addiction drugs can loosen the inhibitions of those they are given to, making them more compliant and accepting. This is the story behind the so-called ‘date rape’ drugs such as Rohypnol which are slipped to potential victims to make them more willing to go home and engage in sex with those who drug them.

A popular fictional use for drugs, as well as a motivation for testing in Vietnam, is as a combat enhancement. Something to cushion the system against the shock of being wounded, to increase alertness, reflexes and to dampen the user’s empathy to make them a more useful killing machine. Other fictional drugs create berserkers. Indeed amphetamines had a lot to do with winning the Battle of Britain due to the quality of amphetamines given to the British pilots to help keep them in the air. If such a drug or ‘potion’ were successfully made, but then used outside of war? Well...

Loss of Health

As discussed before, drug use can have a profound effect on the user’s health. Causes range from personal neglect to the physical and mental effects of the drugs themselves. In many cases this harm can be attributed to the illegal nature of the drugs, unclear and unpredictable supplies or the lack of information about how to safely use the substances in question. Most deaths attributed to ecstasy, by way of example, are down to too little or too much hydration.

The method by which the drug is taken can also have as much, if not more, effect on the health risks as the drug itself. Smoked and inhaled drugs can be rough on the respiratory system causing emphysema or, depending on the method of delivery and the drug itself, mouth or lung cancer. Injected drugs carry risks associated with dirty needles or air in the bloodstream, as well as collapsed veins or the unpredictable effects of other chemicals if the drug has been cut.

Loss of Perspective

Perhaps more profound than any other loss is the potential loss of perspective caused by the drugs, particularly those that are addictive. Powerful drugs can change one’s perspective – not always for the better – and addictive drugs can become someone’s whole world, everything they do fixated upon getting the next fix. Drugs can drive people to steal from their families, to turn to burglary, they can make people act completely out of character and they can replace all other priorities that people have, friends, family, sex, food everything consumed by that single overriding need.

Loss of Money

Drugs are not cheap, even the legal vices are expensive, albeit cheaper to indulge in than the illegal ones. A nicotine addict will spend their last five pounds on a pack instead of food and there are other narcotics more expensive and as much, if not more addictive.

The requirement for cash to feed the habit contributes to the loss of perspective mentioned above and helps drive much of the criminal economy, providing stolen goods and ploughing more money back into the drug dealers. Someone that addicted and that focussed will give up everything they have, car, house, property, to feed their habit as well as anything else they can lay their hands on be they theirs or not.

THE WAR ON DRUGS

With drugs being prohibited and such a major prong in criminal – and terrorist – enterprises the matter of enforcement of that law and prohibition is a major one. The duty of enforcing drug laws and preventing their import, distribution and sale falls to the enforcement branches of government agencies from secret services through customs and police all the way to the military. Interventions even take place in foreign countries to try and deal with major league drug suppliers and their distributors and a massive amount of effort goes in both at ‘home’ and abroad dealing with the problem.

In the real world the strongest proponent of this ‘war on drugs’ is the United States. They sponsor, train and assist anti-drugs programmes and military interventions in cooperative supplying countries, confiscate drug user and dealer property and spend a great deal of resources and time on fighting drugs. As a large and prosperous nation with a large poorer segment of its society the US is a prime target for drugs distributors and produces which spurs on this massive defensive effort.

ANTI DRUGS MOVEMENTS

Anti-drug sentiment doesn’t only stem from health, governmental or taxation issues but also from the ‘moral’ standpoint given by many religions and philosophies. Holy texts can provide prohibitions against certain kinds of food, let alone powerful narcotics. Some more modern sects or religious developments even ban such things as caffeine from being taken. So, on the one hand you have more animistic or spiritual religions that are reasonably happy with, or even promote the use of drugs for spiritual experiences and then, on the other hand, you have the more paternalistic and organised religions that are, for the greater part, against the use of these chemicals.

For this reason the majority of formal anti-drugs organisations, particularly those against legal drugs such as alcohol, tobacco or caffeine, seem to stem from the religious quarter though secular organisations also intervene and lobby based on arguments from a social justice and poverty relief standpoint. The greatest modern day examples, perhaps, being the Mormons, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Islam and the Methodists.

As with many other social ills many Christians believe that addiction can be overcome through faith and the grace of god. Heroin addiction has been claimed to be cured at revival meetings in the same way as other physical ills have claimed to have been cured. Many reformed drug addicts who come out of prison and talk about their experiences around schools and youth clubs are born-again and there is probably something in the idea that faith can bolster a person’s will and give them greater resistance to temptation when they are trying to break a habit.

TEMPERANCE MOVEMENTS

Articles and discussion over the Temperance movement tends to concentrate on the United States where it gained its greatest success, and eventually failure, with prohibition. The Temperance movement was much more widespread than just the US though, and much older than the early part of the 20th

century. Temperance movements were very much concentrated on the prohibition of alcohol, though they started by preaching moderation. However the model of the Temperance movement can serve as a useful example of the swings and roundabout of controlled substances.

The Temperance movement blamed alcohol for a great many of the social ills that arose through the use of alcohol, citing joblessness, spousal abuse, poverty and crime as all being associated with the ‘demon drink’. The women’s movement became involved as well at the time as alcohol, especially in excess, was seen as a mostly male vice and women were often on the receiving end of abuse and other indignity resulted from loosened inhibitions through drink. While, of course, the abusers of alcohol were relatively small and the social drinkers the greater part by majority this did not slow or stop their condemnation.

In the United Kingdom and its commonwealth the Temperance movement was not so involved in politics as it was in the United States with the movement appealing directly to people, forming groups and supporting and celebrating people’s abstinence from drinking with medals and awards. In the United States however, a country of much greater general faith, the movement took off to a much greater degree and was promoted with such faith and fire that it caught the public imagination, culminating in an amendment to the US Constitution and a total ban on alcohol.

The US prohibition is the most famous of these social experiments but was by no means the only country to engage in prohibition with other alcohol bans existing at different periods in places such as Russia and Iceland. To this day many Muslim countries continue to ban alcohol though some accommodations are sometimes made for foreigners. To this day some counties and towns in the US continue to ban or restrict alcohol since the repeal of prohibition was not universal.

Prohibition is, of course, romanticised now what with the dapper suits, swing music, the pretty ‘molls’, the ‘Chicago typewriter’ and the classic cars of the time. Names like Al Capone evoke the period and it can be a good historical shortcut in which to set games or to form a backdrop to games. Perhaps in the future crackhouses, rap music and baggy jeans will evoke the same nostalgia.

Prohibition was touted as the end to a great many social ills and many towns went as far as to sell their jails. However, of course, with hindsight we know what happened. A great many people – not just alcoholics – liked a drink, especially as a social lubricant and resented being told what they could and could not do. The outcome then, at least to us now, is predictable – gangsters began smuggling and selling drink, often poorly produced, corrupt doctors handed out false prescriptions for medicinal alcohol and criminals became some of the most powerful and celebrated figures in America. The health problems associated with drinking poorly produced and cut alcohol – blindness, paralysis and death – were worse than when drink was legal.

The comparison with drugs is not direct though it is likely an outright ban on tobacco would follow a similar course if applied suddenly. Drugs are not as widespread, as ubiquitous nor as socially acceptable as alcohol but a great deal of what happened there happens here. They are blamed for many social ills wholesale and their elimination touted as the cure. They make the criminal fraternity rich, they find their way into people's hands through corruption, many of those involved in enforcement are also takers and the criminals are often wealthy and powerful. Still, we are unlikely to see anything, other than perhaps cannabis, becoming legal any time soon and that is only because its use is almost as widespread and popular as the legal drugs.

COUNTERCULTURE RESPONSE

The countercultural response to the crackdown on drugs has been many and varied and has entangled the pro-drugs movement in everything from civil rights to religion, spiritualism and even farming!

The main approach taken seems to be one of 'personal responsibility', that is that 'what I do to my own body and mind is my business'. You would think this would align the pro-drugs lobby with the right of politics which is usually for smaller government and more personal responsibility but, in actual fact, the right wing usually calls for sterner punishments and more controls in this area. The left wing on the other hand tends to look at the damage drugs can do to society – in their current state – and controls or bans them on that basis.

The legalisation of certain drugs has become allied to a more liberal agenda and has been tried in terms of decriminalisation and limited legalisation with some success but equally some failure as much to do with drugs tourism as anything else, rather similar to the places where prostitution is legalised – generally safer but problematic with those 'visiting' from less liberated places.

Drugs have interwoven themselves into the fabric of society, particularly youth and party culture with marijuana and dance drugs such as ecstasy leading the way. They create a subset of society where drug use is more the norm than the exception and where it is all but expected of people rather than frowned upon. The drug culture present there can create a good experience which can turn the people who are a part of it into evangelists for that drug, seeking to take the accepting and relaxed culture that they have experienced out for others to enjoy.

The altered perceptions and spiritual experiences associated with many drugs give them another angle of attack, that of religious freedom. The Rastafari are the most obvious example with their regarding of marijuana as a religious drug and their biblical references that support their use of it. Indeed many will turn a blind eye to their continued illegal use of it, despite the will of the courts. Religious freedom is defended strongly in many democratic nations and, if a religion of sufficient weight and support regards the use of drugs as acceptable then accommodations will officially or unofficially be made. After all, the Catholic mass could be seen as distributing alcohol to minors

if one wanted to be particular about the law.

The last major prong of the pro-drugs movement is that that gets involved in farming. Many of these drugs grow naturally in various places from marijuana to magic mushrooms to cocoa plants or opium poppies and many can be harvested for otherwise legitimate reasons. Hemp, for example, needn't contain an active amount of THC (the active component in marijuana) but in many places is banned for the same reason as the variant you smoke. The consequence? Many marijuana smokers campaign for hemp to be grown and used even though it is not directly linked to their cause, seeing a crack in the fence that can be pushed at.



THE PHYSICAL EFFECTS OF DRUGS

Benchmark drugs used for the explorations of substances and their effects shall be as follows...

Amphetamines, Cocaine/Crack, Ecstasy, Heroin, Ketamine, LSD, Magic Mushrooms and Marijuana.

Many drugs have a profound physical effect on the body, an effect that can be positive or negative, an effect that can be the reason that the drug is taken in the first place. A previous example given being that of soldiers taking amphetamines in order to stay awake and active in order to fight, a less extreme example being the use of caffeine – a stimulant – in coffee or tea to wake people up for work. Something that just about everyone partakes of.

EFFECTS OF VARIOUS SUBSTANCES ON THE HUMAN BODY AMPHETAMINES

Amphetamines, commonly taken as 'speed' generally appear as a powder that can be snorted, eaten or smoked. Speed is taken as a performance enhancer and as a recreational drug as well as, in medicinal form, administered as an appetite suppressant and to treat hyperactive children and narcolepsy.

On the positive side for the taker they gain faster reflexes, increased stamina and a boost to their energy levels. In game terms these effects might include a 5-10% increase in dexterity and/or reflex type abilities, the removal of the majority of any fatigue effects that they might be suffering and a 5-10% boost to any endurance type stamina/constitution rolls.

On the down side when the drug wears off people who have been kept awake by it tend to crash hard needing a great deal of sleep and rest and feeling very bad for a day or so after taking it. The drug can also cause involuntary twitching, sweats, hyperactivity, nausea, itching, blotchy and greasy skin, increased heart rate and headaches. Not all of these effects are always present in a user but the effect varies from person to person and with the dosage.

Long term regular use can lead to malnutrition, lingering fatigue, tremors, unattractive skin, narrowing of the digestive tract a weakened immune system, erectile dysfunction, heart problems, increased chance of stroke, liver, kidney and lung problems. If snorted, as with most powdered drugs, it can cause great harm to the lining of the nostrils.

A long term user should, therefore, lose perhaps 10% or so from their stamina/constitution type statistic and perhaps the same from their appearance.

COCAINE/CRACK

Cocaine appears as a white or off white powder though, if prepared as crack appears as yellowish 'rocks' or lumps. It is generally smoked or snorted, smoked in the case of crack, to have its effect and some of the raw physical damage caused by the drug depends on the method used to take it.

Cocaine is a powerful stimulant to the central nervous system

with the effect depending on the dosage, strength and method by which it is taken. Crack causes a much shorter but more powerful high while the powdered form provides a smoother high lasting up to several hours.

Cocaine has similar effects to amphetamines upon the body though the effects are not usually as marked or powerful and nor is the comedown. In game terms cocaine might provide a +5% bonus to dexterity/reflexes and remove up to 50% of a person's fatigue, allowing them to keep going on and counter exhaustion for a time.

The negative effects of the drug include increased blood pressure and attendant strain upon the circulatory system, increased heart rate and can result, especially in overdoses, in respiratory failure, stroke, brain haemorrhage and heat failure and can cause hypothermia. Simply taking it can cause uncontrollable twitching and teeth grinding in addition to these other effects.

Long term abuse greatly increases a person's risk of heart attack by up to seven times that of someone who does not take the drug. In game terms that can be reflected in a weakening of the cardiovascular system resulting in a loss of 10% or so from a character's constitution/stamina type statistic.

Other long term physical effects of use include chest pains, lung damage, shortness of breath, sore throat, a roughened speaking voice and aching joints. As with any snorted drug cocaine can severely damage the nostrils even leading to the complete loss of the septum.

ECSTASY

Ecstasy is a drug taken in pill form and generally associated with dance culture, particularly the rave culture of the late 80s and 90s. It is championed almost as much as marijuana is by the pro-drugs subculture despite receiving much more negative press than marijuana does these days.

The physical effects of ecstasy include an increased amount of energy and endurance – allowing one to dance all night and a heightened sense of touch. Some people report an aphrodisiacal quality to the drug, associated with this increase in touch sensation but an equal number report impotence as a result. It may be better as a sexual-enhancement drug for women than men in that case. In game terms these effects might result in a lessening of fatigue, but up to 25% and an increase in stamina/constitution by +5% for the 4-6 hour duration of the drug's effect. The increase in tactile sensation can make fiddly tasks a little easier, perhaps providing a 5% bonus to any tasks that seem appropriate.

Negative physical effects of the drug, besides the reported impotence problems, can include hypothermia (ecstasy messes with your body's ability to regulate temperature), overheating, dehydration (it also suppresses thirst) and, in rare cases, a dangerous allergic reaction which may be the cause of some of the ecstasy related deaths.

The overheating can cause damage to the immune system resulting in weakened defences against disease and infection though these effects may be fairly short term. Attempts to counter the dehydration problem can result in problems of their own. Too much water can damage the body and result in brain swelling which is another of the most common causes for ecstasy related deaths.

Ecstasy has not been studied intensively enough to be entirely sure of any long term physical effects but, as a stimulant, it is likely that it has a similar, but lesser, long term effect on the body as amphetamines.

HEROIN

Heroin comes in powdered form or in lumps of various colours from white to off-white to brown and even black. It can be snorted, smoked, injected or the fumes from it as it is heated can be inhaled. It is one of the most addictive – and physically addictive at that – drugs known with only nicotine as its real rival in the addiction stakes. This is because heroin replaces the production of natural endorphins, the body's own painkiller, meaning that without a supply of the drug there is no replacement for the endorphins which results in the pains and agonies of withdrawal. It takes some time after the cessation of the taking of the drug for the body to recover and produce endorphins by itself again.

Heroin has little to nothing in the way of positive physical effects.

The negative or neutral physical effects are many and varied however. The drug causes a shallowness of respiration which, in overdoses, can lead to respiratory failure. It also causes a slowing of the heartbeat which similarly can cause it to stop. In game terms this may have some utility in slowing the spread of poisons or putting people into a state of semi-hibernation to preserve air but in real life terms it is quite dangerous.

As with other drugs the method of taking the drug can have bad physical effects. Injecting heroin carries with it the attendant risks of infection be it from used needles or a lack of hygiene in general. Snorting it causes damage to the nostrils and smoking it can cause damage to the lungs.

Heroin also has the 'pleasant' side-effects of nausea, vomiting and chronic constipation which in habitual users, along with their usual lack of self-care, does not make for a good combination.

The major, and most negative, physical effects come with the onset of withdrawal. A regular user requires constant – and stronger – use of the drug in order to maintain the same effect from taking it. Without those doses the problems begin.

Symptoms of withdrawal include sweating, persistent and painful erections, cramping pains, excessive yawning, chills, goosebumps, fever, intense itching and muscle spasms in the legs.

Long term heroin abusers can do serious harm to their bodies attaining the whipcord thin, 'consumptive' look of 'heroin chic'. In game terms this should be reflected in a 10-20% reduction in dexterity, strength and stamina type abilities.

KETAMINE

Ketamine is a horse tranquiliser primarily, its human use have gone into decline due to hallucinogenic side effects. It is also an effective anaesthetic that does not carry so much attendant risk to the respiratory or circular systems as most other anaesthetics. Ketamine is usually encountered in pill, powder or liquid form, often mistakenly sold as ecstasy tablets though having a much different effect. It can be snorted, ingested or injected with varying onset times and periods of effect depending on method and dosage. Besides its veterinary uses ketamine is still employed as an anaesthetic when the medical history of a subject is unknown (and they may react badly to conventional anaesthetics) and it is being used in experiments to treat alcoholism and heroin addiction.

Ketamine's physical effects are few, other than the numbing of pain though this is achieved as much through psychological disassociation from the body as anything else. As with any drug large doses and protracted usage out a strain on the organs the body uses to deal with toxins and veterinary doses (the amounts and types that usually find their way onto the black market) are not designed with human bodymass in consideration and can be dangerous.

In game terms ketamine might allow someone to ignore penalties caused to them by debilitating wounds but they would lose 10-20% of their normal ability to perform complex and dextrous tasks.

LSD

LSD is a powerful drug, the most powerful by weight yet discovered, and it occurs in a colourless, odourless liquid with a bitter taste in its unadulterated form. In the past it has been used in various psychological experiments and is inextricably bound up in the psychedelic movement of the 60s and 70s. It may still have potent applications in psychiatric medicine, as well as the less savoury field of mind control, but it is completely banned in western nations, even for medical usage.

25 micrograms of the drug is considered to be enough to cause hallucinogenic effects with most doses in the range 25-80 micrograms (most substances are administered in milligrams for comparison). In the 1960s doses were as high as 300 micrograms and some may experiment as high as 1200 milligrams. Negative and powerful effects of the drug are far more likely as you increase in dosage however.

Physical reactions to LSD can be more wide ranging and powerful than one might expect from a psychoactive drug. Physical reactions can include contractions of the uterus, hot flushes, blood sugar level rising by a high degree the drying out of the mouth, goosebumps, elevated heartrate, the grinding of teeth and the clenching of the jaw, nausea, sweating, difficulty focussing, excessive salivation, dripping nose and bodily

tremors. Other symptoms such as cramps and strained muscles are likely due to disassociation with the body and the strange contortions those who 'trip' can find themselves in.

LSD can also be effective at treating pain, even at sub psychedelic doses, even being more effective than the more traditional opiates. Not that it is used this way any longer.

In game terms someone under the effects of LSD could be at anything from -5 to -30% to any dextrous tasks depending on their dosage, or these tasks may be rendered entirely impossible. They will also be somewhat resistant to pain and so penalties imposed by painful injuries should be reduced somewhat.

Contrary to urban legends, flashbacks are not the result of physical manifestations of the drug.

MAGIC MUSHROOMS

Mushrooms, or 'shrooms, covers a wide variety of psychoactive mushrooms but in the vernacular usage generally refers to a small group of safe psychoactive mushrooms from the psilocybe group. Other more dangerous mushrooms can have the same or stronger effect but are generally associated with much more dangerous side effects and nastier reactions than what are commonly sold as 'magic mushrooms'.

Mushrooms are generally swallowed though they can be taken a number of other ways including being brewed into a tea. Eaten mushrooms will have a longer term effect with 'surges' married to the digestive cycle. Tea has a far milder effect that does not last as long but which is more predictable.

Physical effects are generally few, provided the correct mushrooms are taken. They may include chills or overheating, stomach ache and mild nausea. A user may slump into a completely introverted state where it can be hard to get them to react to external stimulus.

MARIJUANA

Marijuana is, probably, the most widely used and available illegal narcotic in the world its use so typical and widespread that it's banning and criminality is often held up as an example as to why anti-drug laws are ineffective. In many demographics you'd be hard pressed to find someone who hasn't tried marijuana in one form or another.

The effects of marijuana depend massively on the strength of it and the method used to take it. The effects listed here may not occur in all people who take the drug nor may they occur except at the higher doses. Obviously smoking it is the most physically damaging way to take it, the other being to ingest it, filterless a rolled marijuana cigarette, or inhalation through a pipe – even a water pipe – can result in damage to the lungs and a great deal more tar than occurs with filtered cigarettes. Those who smoke cannabis often mix it with tobacco which increases the carcinogenic chances and causes nicotine addiction.

Cannabis doesn't have a great many directly physical effects but there are effects that have physical consequences. Sensation

can be altered and particularly sexual sensation may be more pleasurable and felt with greater clarity, an increase in appetite can result in overindulgence; the mouth can become dry and cloying and nausea and increased heart rate can result.

In game terms cannabis should provide a very small bonus to perceptive abilities and little else on the physical front. Cannabis can lay itself down in body fat however and can continue to have a subtle long term effect on the habitual user though this tends to be regarding social and mental capacities rather than the physical.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECT OF DRUGS EFFECTS OF VARIOUS SUBSTANCES ON THE HUMAN MIND AMPHETAMINES

Speed, Base and similar drugs derived from amphetamines are not necessarily all bad for the taker. They act as an appetite suppressant and so many assist a character in slimming or in resisting the temptation of food providing a significant (up to 25%) bonus to do so. Speed is also used to treat hyperactivity and attention deficit disorder, as well as narcolepsy and, if the treatment is successful can reduce or eliminate the drawbacks of those conditions from a character.

In addition to these psychological effects amphetamines allow someone to concentrate, to think more clearly and more quickly and so can provide a 5-10% bonus to a character's intelligence and perception type abilities as well as a similar bonus to any tasks that require a lot of concentration.

Other short term mental effects of the drug include euphoria, chattiness, increased confidence, increased social ability and increased sex drive and response. In game terms this can be reflected in small (up to 5%) bonuses to charisma type abilities, social skills and willpower/psychological resistance. On the downside the drug also can cause psychological dependence, depression on the comedown, hallucinations and loss of deep REM sleep.

Long term use can result in schizophrenia, increased aggression, irritability, panic attacks and in rare and extreme cases amphetamine psychosis (paranoid delusions). A long term user should take penalties of 10% or so to their charisma type abilities and their willpower/resistance.

COCAINE/CRACK

The main psychological effect of cocaine is euphoria. With snorting or smoking normal cocaine this is less powerful but lasts longer, with crack it is much more powerful but extremely transitory, lasting not much longer than the time it takes the user to inhale.

The drug can also cause hyperactive tension, the need to be up and about doing things, restlessness and, coming down off the drug depression and a major craving to experience the euphoria from taking the drug again. In positive terms, psychologically, cocaine causes a greatly increased sense of confidence and self worth increasing the user's charisma/charm type ability by 10%

or so as well as providing a similar boost to their will/mental resistance.

Negative psychological effects include paranoia (increasing with frequent use of the drug) rare hallucinations and, with habitual and long term use itching and the delusion that spiders or parasites of some kind are infesting the body.

Cocaine is an extremely addictive drug and, though its price has cheapened since the 1980s is still associated with the rich yuppie/businessman image.

ECSTASY

For a time ecstasy was valued as a therapeutic drug designed to overcome post-traumatic stress disorder and to get people to empathise with and understand each other. In some places it is still used in this manner and accompanied by therapy may well assist characters in games with some sort of 'sanity system' where they have suffered trauma or fear-based mental health problems.

The mental effects of ecstasy include a general increase in perception, in openness, empathy and self awareness – all of this along with a euphoric high that lasts, at different levels, throughout the duration of the drug. In game terms this should result in a +5% bonus to perception type abilities along with a +10-15% increase in charisma type abilities for as long as the effect lasts.

The mental downside is largely linked to the comedown which can include depression, sleep problems, decreased libido in some cases and the after-effects of overheating or dehydration, similar to a normal, alcohol related hangover.

Long term effects are hard to gauge with several conflicting studies in existence. However there does seem to be a correlation between ecstasy use and long term depression. There may also be persistent hallucinations and there are several indicators that heavy use can result in long term damage to the brain resulting in a loss of empathy and cognitive function. This is yet to be satisfactorily proven however.

HEROIN

Psychologically speaking heroins effects are greatly related to the side effects of withdrawal and addiction, most notably the loss of perspective due to the intensely addictive nature of the drug. This means the addict comes to care about little else than their acquisition and taking of the drug to the detriment of their friendships, appearance, eating and any other societal conventions or requirements.

More direct effects of the drug include confusion and 'nodding', going into a sleepy state where the head keeps nodding as they almost drift off to sleep. On the more positive side they get a strong and reasonably long lasting state of euphoria from the drug, stronger and more immediate than with other opiates. Additionally heroin has been linked with many creative types apparently enhancing and inspiring their creative ability, at least until their addiction grows out of control. In game terms this

could be reflected in a 10% penalty to observational and perception type abilities but an increase of 5% or so in relation to creative skills.

Withdrawal comes with its own problems in addition to the physical problems. Anxiety, increased depression, trouble sleeping and general tiredness and feeling of illness all compliment the physical symptoms of withdrawal and make it even harder to kick the habit. Cravings can outlast the physical need and requirement for heroin meaning relapses are very possible.

KETAMINE

Ketamine is a disassociative anaesthetic which means that it removes a sense of connection to the body or to its actions or its pain inducing a feeling that it is being observed from outside with this often manifesting in out-of-body experiences for the user of the drug. This has also lead to it being used in isolation tank experiments and other cases where attempts have been made to separate consciousness from the demands and sensations of the body, making it a popular complimentary drug to the psychedelic scene.

Lesser doses create this feeling of disconnection and hallucinations will only occur where external stimuli are lessened or removed, such as sitting in a darkened room. The higher the dose the more acute and insistent the hallucinations become with larger doses leading to flights of fancy to other worlds or hallucinated meetings with deities. Ketamine can also have a profound effect on memory and thought and hallucinations or waking dreams may not be remembered – or only half remembered – after the trip and people on the drug will have problems thinking and in some cases even remembering their name.

As an hallucinogenic ketamine may prove inspiring, particularly to visual artists and creative enterprises should gain a +5-10% boost influenced by the drug. In appropriate game settings ketamine could give access to dream dimensions or aid with shamanic rituals or vision quests. While under the influence however a penalty of anything from -5 to -20% should be imposed on tasks requiring logical thought processes or memory.

PCP is a similar drug and the disassociative state may be responsible for the urban legends about hard-to-take down psychotic criminals overturning cars and not being taken down despite being shot.

LSD

LSD is the classic psychoactive drug and will always be associated with hallucinations and 'trips', even more so than older natural drugs used to the same end. LSD appears to work by hyperstimulating the flow of information around the brain causing both a sort of synaesthesia (confused perceptions, smelling green, tasting thunder and so on) and the activation and association of parts of the brain that are not normally active. This is at least part of the reasoning behind theories that psychedelics may have played a role in the development of human consciousness and also makes LSD a firm favourite with

some of the new-age and psychic subcultures. It has even been explored in comics as a possible source for the gaining of superpowers.

The main effect of LSD is 'the trip', a period of hallucination and an altered state of consciousness experienced differently by each taker of the drug depending on their mindset, where they are and who they are with. A comfortable surrounding, with someone to help talk them down and a positive attitude going into the trip will usually result in a 'good' one while anxiety, panic or unexpected complications around the person will usually result in a 'bad' trip. A good trip can be a magical experience of one degree or another while a bad trip can be unsettling or even hellish and either can have a profound effect on the emotional state and wellbeing of the person taking the drug.

Sensory effects can include heightened colour perception or shifting perception of brightness, darkness and shade, tone and colour as well as distortions of the perception of distance, shape and volume of objects or areas. As with most hallucinogenic substances LSD is also associated with spiritual experiences where people feel that they have experienced divinity or mysticism.

Flashbacks and 'wandering' (where people on the drug enter a fugue state and end up wandering and doing things that may harm themselves or others) seem to be associated more with people who have existing psychological problems of one sort or another and flashbacks may result from some permanent change in the structure of thought in the individual, triggered by some later experience.

On the more negative side LSD can trigger existing tendency towards psychosis, though the effects can be temporary, or trigger an incidence of a previously 'cured' mental problem.

In game terms LSD is an inspiring experience for many artists in many fields and should provide a +10-20% bonus for works in that vein. Even though those under the influence may be able to spend hours examining a single item or mark no bonuses are given for concentration and any activities requiring concentration or mental faculty should receive a -10 to -50% penalty depending on dosage and the intricacy of the task. Other effects will depend on the mental state and background of the character involved. Low doses may heighten awareness providing a +5% boost to perception type abilities. The drug can also prove useful in spiritual and occult oriented games especially ones with more postmodern magical principles to them.

MAGIC MUSHROOMS

Again, as with other psychedelics the effects of magic mushrooms depend on dose but include the usual panoply of visual effects. Mushrooms are generally thought to provide a 'smoother' and more natural trip than the effects of LSD or other synthetic agents and seem to have less nasty side effects the primary concern being that someone might pick the wrong ones and poison themselves.

As with ketamine lower doses will only produce a heightened sense of awareness and 'otherness' with hallucinations and visual effects only manifesting if other stimuli are less available, as in the darkened room. With increased dosage the effects become more vivid and will manifest despite plenty of other stimuli.

Euphoric, spiritual and deity-touching experiences are associated with the use of mushrooms and they have a long association with spiritual and shamanic cultures, which helps their credibility amongst the legalisation lobby along with their relative lack of side effects and their natural status. On the downside they can equally induce feelings of paranoia and persecution which can be hard to shake while under the influence.

Mushrooms can enhance creativity in the same way as the other psychoactives can, inspiring and mixing up perceptions in ways that can inspire an artist to do more or to experiment with their work. The drug tends to cause people to become introspective and can help them come to insights about themselves.

In game terms mushrooms should provide a +5-10% bonus to creative efforts and the introspection should provide an unspecified bonus to working through certain problems. While under the influence coherence and concentration on anything meaningful or worthwhile can prove very difficult giving a -5 to -25% penalty on such actions depending on the dose.

MARIJUANA

The psychological effects of marijuana are more varied and acute than the physical effects. They are also many, varied and well documented though people don't necessarily react in the same way to the drug as an individual or on each usage.

Effects include mild euphoria, stress relief, a better sense of humour and artistic appreciation, a sense of newness and wonder to things, short term memory loss, drowsiness and laziness, dizziness, headaches, nausea, loss of verbal articulation paranoia and anxiety.

In game terms there should be a small, perhaps -5% reduction in willpower and resistance to mental affects along with a general -5% penalty to physical activities. Conversely a +5% bonus in things like art appreciation, humour appreciation and so on should be given and the level of a character's stress can be relieved effectively by the drug.

Habitual users, with high levels of THC (the active drug) laid down in their system may suffer from these penalties and bonuses for a majority of the time and a side effect of this may be difficulty holding down a job, acting appropriately and so on.

In extreme cases cannabis has been associated with the triggering of mental illness, particularly schizophrenia but this is extremely rare. Marijuana remains a relatively safe drug compared to most illegal narcotics.

THE SOCIAL EFFECT OF DRUGS

While one of the great defences of drug-taking is that it is a personal responsibility and right what one does with one's own body it is a great attack upon drugs that the effects are more far-reaching and have wider impact than simply upon the individual taking them. Drugs affect attitude and inhibition and can lead people to act in aberrant and dangerous ways, driving under the influence of alcohol or chemical intoxicants is dangerous to bystanders, the physical damage from drug use puts an unnecessary strain on the health system and, where these substances are illegal, crime must often be engaged in to feed the habit and money funnels back to unsavoury organisations and groups.

Some of these problems could be overcome if drugs were legalised and regulated, but not all of them and, indeed, the more widespread and accepted use of certain substances could contribute to a significant rise in driving and industrial related accidents. Marijuana roadside tests are already being trialled due to the widespread use of the substance and its believed contribution to traffic accidents.

SOCIAL LUBRICANT

Legal or illegal drugs act as a social lubricant, in moderation. They loosen people up, get them talking, give them a reason to share something and – in the case of illegal drugs – talking about where they can be acquired or sharing experiences can act as a conversational icebreaker. The drug of choice can also be a social identifier helping people to mark themselves out as one type of person or another. Drugs can be a fashion statement.

A party with coke laid out on silver trays may be different to an evening at a cocktail bar downing shots with friends but many of the aims are the same, to loosen up, to relax, to have fun and to make the social experience more interesting and easier to participate in. Providing the substance, be it alcohol or something else, for somebody is an icebreaker and an introduction, even a first step towards seduction and drugs also have their role as an enhancement of the sexual experience.

Different drugs can have different effects on different areas of inhibition. Some can make a person more aggressive and violent, more likely to get into a fight with someone, others provide confidence or a sense of relaxation that someone does not normally feel. Those feelings that the chemical instils can lead someone to take risks or act in ways they would not normally do, possibly to their benefit. This is one of the reasons that alcohol also goes by the name 'Dutch courage' – something that is drunk for bravery.

PEER PRESSURE

The flip side of this social aspect is, of course, the expectation to take drugs. If one does not indulge and one is put into a situation with others who do then the situation can become awkward and the pressure to conform massive. Smokers and alcoholics are most likely to slip in social situations and drug-using groups can be insular, making it all the harder to give up if all your friends and social contacts still indulge.

There is also an effect that the abstainer can have upon those who are indulging. Their refusal can be seen as judgemental or as uncomfortable to them, spoiling the high they are seeking and creating negative feelings which can impact on their experience of the drug. They can also cause feelings of guilt in those who are partaking and nobody especially likes to be made to feel guilty, inferior or less than anybody else.

Social context, in both directions, makes a massive impact on the acceptability and effect of substances that can alter people's moods; this is especially true of psychedelics where an atmosphere of disapproval and disdain, along with harsh or cruel commentary, can send someone on a 'bad trip'. While the public mainstream culture may be very much anti-drug many subcultures spring up where it is much more accepted and, being the social context of the takers this can become a self-reinforcing clique who differentiate themselves from the 'herd' partially through their drug taking.

CRIMINAL MIXING

A direct consequence of the illegality of most narcotics in most places is that in order to acquire the drugs one must mix with the criminal element. Not all dealers and certainly not all their sources are necessarily takers of their own product and their motivation is the same as any other businessman – profit. That aim and that goal are what lead to rivalries between gangs, to the cutting of drugs with potentially harmful substances and to the exploitation of addicts.

One can never be entirely sure what one is buying, whether it's been mixed with lemon fresh cleaning agents or if it is even what you are told it is. Securing a reliable supply is a goal for anyone that takes drugs on a regular basis but even the most reliable supply can 'run dry' on occasion forcing people to look elsewhere and to the unfamiliar sources.

Drugs suppliers are also not above using their 'customers' to other ends, particularly addicts – and drugs have been linked in the past with keeping people employed in other criminal enterprises in line, through their addiction, particularly prostitution. Indeed many other things than money can be traded for drugs, something that keeps the traffic in stolen goods flowing regularly and many of those who find themselves on the 'street' end of prostitution are there because of their addiction.

Having to go to criminals can make those who purchase from them out to be criminals as well, of course, possession is illegal but the users of many substances are everyday people who can end up criminalised and socially shunned, even arrested, due to the contacts they have to make to pursue their need. Even buying for friends in one go, or buying ahead to save money can get someone branded a dealer themselves and land them in prison with their property confiscated and a social stigma for the rest of their life.

NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS

An awful lot of time and money has been invested in, not drugs education, but in anti-drug propaganda. Providing people with the plain facts does not discourage them from trying the drugs

for themselves and so is not seen as an appropriate anti-drugs tactic in much the same way that honest sex-education and the provision of condoms is often seen as promoting underage sexual activity.

The practical upshot of this media blitz as well as the urban myths around various drugs is that outside of their own insular culture they carry massive negative connotations and cultural danger flags. Harm to minors, crack babies, invincible gang members on PCP, ruined marriages, joblessness and many other horrible stereotypes that don't necessarily ring true. These images nonetheless stick and are equally applied in horrified terror whether the person is a weekend warrior who takes a couple of pills when they're out clubbing or a hardened heroin addict living from fix to fix.

Drug taking even if long known about can completely destroy someone's reputation if it gets out. The most recent and well known example of this would be Kate Moss whose career has suffered a massive setback due to being caught out taking coke. Never mind that drug use is accepted within the industry to a great degree, even expected, never mind that it is part of the stereotype of the supermodel, the pop star or any other famous person – the moment it is proven they get painted with all the bad press and can no longer expect the success they once did.

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DRUGS IN FANTASY

Fantasy settings are difficult things to pin down, especially in regard to social structures such as a society's response to drugs. Fantasy straddles historical realism, magic, alchemy and their impact on society and also bend to accommodate modern social thought to some degree. Thus one can encounter the technology level of medieval England – through to the renaissance and beyond, with magical healing more effective than modern medicine and all combined with modern attitudes towards women's rights and a tolerance for behaviour that in real medieval times would have seen people tortured and burned.

Drugs therefore, also present a problem, especially as fantasy worlds – in addition to the above stated problems – also often have a mish-mash of cultures and influences. The medieval world all the way through to Victorian times did not care or regulate over much what people did to themselves, other than locking up the occasional drunk overnight, magic allows for addiction 'cures' and faith may be a genuine preventative when gods are real, yet these two elements couple with modern attitudes – that drugs are bad. Throw on the often magical herbs that exist and allow for magical or alchemical enhancement of those herbs and you complicate matters even further!

The advice and ideas in this section shall, then, try to be as generic as possible and to allow for as many different interpretations as possible to fit the many and varied approaches to fantasy worlds that are taken in games. Simply shape and mould and add a little 'local flavour' to fit your particular fantasy world.

SHAMANIC DRUG USE

Many fantasy games retain 'primitive' cultures in some, or all, parts of their world. These can be jungle tribes in hidden lands or barbarian peoples of the steppes and mountains, they may even be those who follow a certain god or religious path and who take to that life away from the civilised people. Druids would be an obvious example of the latter choice.

To all of these peoples spiritual experiences are going to be fairly important either to commune with the spirits of the wild, their ancestors or their gods and drugs of various sorts are linked in real world cultures to this sort of animistic spiritualism. Thus the use of drugs – or other methods such as fasting, sweat lodges or isolation – will likely be more common in these cultures than in the more civilised peoples.

This comes with some attendant thoughts. Firstly, these substances may be taboo, perhaps only the tribal shaman is taught how to pick and prepare the drug for use to the best effect and, in a high magic game, he may need to infuse the plant or animal extract with magic before it is safe or before it can be used in the correct spiritual context. Someone without the right spiritual credentials harvesting the sacred plant or animal may find themselves cursed, haunted or simply hated and hunted by the tribe.

In game terms these drugs can have many potential effects from the simply hallucinogenic to useful effects such as recharging spells, providing bonuses to praying or deciding on the correct answer to theological puzzles, as a sign of devotion or bonding with a tribe or transporting the taker of the drugs to the realm of the dead or the land of the spirit for the duration of the drug's effect. Suitably prepared these drugs can be suitable substitutes for spells or psychic effects such as astral travel, clairvoyance, telepathy and their ilk though the drugs should always carry some sort of penalty in order to allow the spells to retain their usefulness and relevance.

A good source of conflict, and thus adventure, often comes from the clash between cultures and the wild and more naturalistic and chaotic barbarian peoples often make good foils for this sort of story against a more civilised and modern nation. When it comes to drug use what is normal and expected within a barbarian culture as religious observance may be abhorrent within a more civilised setting to the people there, be it getting smashed out of your skull on mushrooms or sacrificing a live goat on the special holiday of your god.

CIVILISED DRUG USE

Drug use in more 'civilised' lands with more regulated and formal main religions is less likely to involve drug use, altered states of consciousness or to include drugs that may bring people into contact with the spirit or ghost realms. Those are things which are likely considered extremely dangerous and irresponsible to meddle with if you are not in a social elite such as wizards as the clergy. A reflection of the taboos and secret knowledge of the more tribal societies but not an exact copy.

Civilisation does create other factors that can contribute to drug use such as larger concentrations of people, industry, wealth, leisure time and the processes that can create stronger forms of existing substances. Cheaper stills and the invention of gin took alcohol from being a staple – in the form of small beer for drinking – to a menace with the kind of social effects that, these days, are attributed to crack cocaine. A civilised fantasy society has the wealth, time and processes possible for something more like a modern drug problem to emerge and drug dens should probably be as ubiquitous in fantasy games as the ever present brothels and inns are – at least in the towns and cities.

The presence of magic and alchemy present all sorts of additional possibilities for increasing the potency of various substances or giving them magical effects similar to those ascribed to shamanic drugs though these drugs would be prohibitively expensive for any but the noble, merchant or adventuring classes. In the same way that mages can enhance weapons or stir up potions for more practical use so they should also be able to turn their talents to making more effective narcotics with more precise or powerful effects. Alchemists on the other hand with their equipment, purification, identification of properties and their distillation techniques should be able to extract and enrich particular effects to make existing drugs far, far more potent or precise as well as, in a large enough city, being able to industrialise the process to a degree and grow very rich from it.

A more civilised society also tends to mean laws and governance and with wealth in towns depending more on a competent and capable workforce legitimate traders and nobles who own businesses of their own may provide enough pressure to make certain substances illegal. Similarly, with the clerical profession bearing a close resemblance to medical as well as religious authority in most fantasy worlds there may be pressure brought to bear there on two fronts if the drugs produced have a deleterious physical or mental effect and cause real harm to those who take them.

An effective investigative police force is unlikely in a fantasy town, at least on a truly organised basis, with any watch or peace force mostly concerned with patrolling the streets and dealing with any problems that they happen to directly run across rather than actively seeking out wrongdoing. This is going to be fairly ineffective at dealing with habitual drug taking and will only drive it off the streets. Enforcement and investigation of particularly troublesome drug sources, dealers or production is likely to be farmed out to the likes of adventuring groups on a case by case basis providing them with something significant to do.

Besides the recreational drug uses of the city dwelling worker drugs may also be used in other ways to add flavour and colour to various aspects of the more 'civilised' life in fantasy towns and cities. Hidden worship, cults or evil gods can integrate drug taking into their worship and their initiation rites. With the loss of inhibitions that come with many drugs people can be persuaded to do things that can later be held over them to keep them in line or addiction can equally be used to rein in members of a cult who are having second thoughts. On a magical basis drugs can be used to help these cultists commune with their god and receive their 'orders' from on high, the problem with many cults in fantasy games being that they are not necessarily deluded but are, in fact, carrying out the will of their deity.

PLAUSIBLE DRUGS

The temptation may be there in a fantasy setting to give various drugs the wide ranging and drastic effects that the mushroom had in *Alice in Wonderland* but even in a high fantasy game a drug with too powerful or strange an effect can be detrimental to the mood or point of putting such elements into the game in the first place and, paradoxically perhaps, reducing their impact. Drugs should probably derive from a real-world source that is then expanded and broadened to take in the added scope of being in a fantasy world.

The best way to think on how to approach a drug in a fantasy game is to start with something that already exists and then fit it into the fantasy elements, rather than to start with an outlandish effect that you want and work backwards. Let's try an example...

I'm working on a death-cult tribe from a dark evil jungle in a campaign. They are fiercely territorial, cannibalistic and serve a death god/spirit associated with a blood-dripping tree at the heart of their camp and from which they derive their sacred drug. I decide that this drug is going to be a downer type drug and a

disassociative, something like a combination of heroin and ketamine.

I decide that the drug is going to be derived from their 'tree of death' and is sanctified by their shaman, formed from the resin that flows down the tree like blood and is then smoked, in its pure form it will be used as a poison on their arrows and spears, the poison making their enemies sluggish and low in energy until they fall. Properly prepared it will make the takers of it tougher and relatively insensible to pain though it will also have a negative effect on their ability to fire arrows or throw their spears accurately.

Now to add the fantasy element, the drug is used in times of peace to visit their ancestors and the ghosts of those they have killed and eaten in the lands of the dead, as well as to commune with their god. In times of war however the whole tribe will take the drug in a great ceremony in an even larger dose than usual. The drug forms a bridge between the lands of the dead and the real world and, should they fall, an ancestor spirit will be able to take over their body and fight on, effectively doubling the tribe's numbers since each fallen can then rise as a sacred zombie to fight on.

LEGALISATION

Legalisation isn't an issue in tribal societies though the enforcement of taboos and the continued handing down of the sacred knowledge and the prestige that accompanies it is. The issue there is not so much of legalisation but the protection of the secrets that are held in trust for the whole tribe or group. Legalisation only truly becomes an issue of interest within civilised societies and their use of drugs.

In the more civilised nations and within their cities there may be pressure from various quarters to make various chemicals, or even distilled spirits, illegal but equally there may be other pressures to keep them legal. Nobles may value their occasional tittle of narcotics at their parties, members of drug taking undergrounds or cults may hold positions of power and, if these substances make a great deal of money then there may be pressure from the guilds and merchants who control that supply and have a not-inconsiderable amount of wealth as a result.

Legalisation also brings with it the possibility of tax revenue which brings with it new avenues of opportunity for the criminal fraternity in smuggling to avoid tax and reaping their profit there – provided the tax is high enough. The crown benefits from the imposition of the tax and, despite the energy devoted by the authorities to cracking down on smugglers and illegal producers they can often make more money provided they undercut the legal sources.

In practice, without more effective enforcement – something that didn't really come about until after the historical period that most fantasy games derive from – then the legal or illegal status of any drug, chemical or tittle is more or less irrelevant. It may be disapproved of or hidden but in the large cities, in the 'thieves' quarter' or slums the use of a wide variety of substances and spirit-fuelled drunkenness should be common.

THIEVES GUILDS

A common thread in many fantasy games is the existence of criminal guilds, organised crime that is organised on a level that far outstrips the organisation of the forces of law and order. Thieves' guilds also often include assassin's guilds, beggars and other illegal or semi-legal professions under their umbrella and this would, naturally, include drug producers, drug dealers and smugglers as a natural source of financing far superior to simple burglary.

Legal or illegal the thieves' guilds are going to want a piece of whatever goes on in the trade of recreational substances and the appeal of a captive market formed through addiction is not going to be lost on them. As master poisoners assassins and thieves are also going to be very familiar with a wide variety of substances, many drugs are classified as poisons and are just taken in their weaker form in any case.

In cases where the substances are illegal these guilds can make an even greater amount by producing as well as distributing and skimming product and it would be more realistic if drug/distilled alcohol production was the main thrust of these organisations rather than simple thievery. With thieves' guilds being so organised this production should be able to occur almost unabated and would make the thieves' guilds and their cover organisations some of the most wealthy and powerful in any city. Not entirely unlike the real world in the modern day.

This does shift the nature and emphasis of thieves' guilds away from their normal fantasy role as the home of the loveable rogue and the ambitious thief and so may need some thought and accommodation before being integrated into a campaign, especially one containing thieves, as it is a far reaching and fairly fundamental shift. One counter to this can be to root thieves' organisations in the 'common people' and having them dead set against the detrimental effects of drugs within those communities, not unlike some of the old romanticised mafias and firms of classic real world gangsterism.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MAGIC USE AND PSIONICS

The implications of drug use upon, for want of a better term, 'divine magic' has been touched upon already. Drugs are clearly important in spiritual matters in various ways and, depending on the game, the use of these substances may allow an early 'spell recharge' or bonuses towards some ends such as reaching the spirit world or understanding matters of theology.

Similarly drugs may also assist with the scholarly pursuit of more 'arcane' magic – magic dependent on process rather than belief. Drugs can enhance concentration allowing someone to learn complex principles more quickly and to retain them better. In a game with Vance-style spell memorisation this may even allow for a greater number of spells to be memorised or may speed up the spell memorisation process by some degree. It can also assist in creating flashes of inspiration allowing leaps to the discovery or creation of new spells.

Psionic abilities may be enhanced, or scrambled, by the taking of mind expanding drugs, though astral travel and other out of body abilities such as telepathy or clairvoyance may be boosted to a greater degree by these chemicals. Psychedelic drugs may be an important method towards awakening psi abilities in the first place and may well form part of any initiation into the mysteries of psychic disciplines. Equally some activated or enhanced drugs may give temporary access to psychic abilities where none were held before.

Drugs can also be used to weaken someone's resolve or mental agility in preparation to use a mind controlling spell or power upon them, to make them more suggestable and in these cases the effects of the drug should weaken any resistance to such effects that someone might have normally according to the rules of the game. This can also apply to similar effects such as hypnotism or the effects of magic items and potions that affect someone's behaviour.

When allowing or creating substances that do provide this sort of bonus it is important that they have some kind of limit and some kind of personal cost associated with them. If you do not include important counterbalancing measures then you are just providing additional ways that people can min-max their characters and this can make creating balanced adventures all the more difficult.

Within superhero games a 'trigger' to superpowers is often required and drugs can be an interesting trigger substance. Drugs are already associated in urban myth and fiction as providing somewhat superhuman abilities so it is only a small step to use them as an access to superpowers. This theme was examined in the 2000AD strip 'Storming Heaven' where LSD unlocked portions of the human mind giving access to assorted psychedelic superpowers.

STORY SEEDS

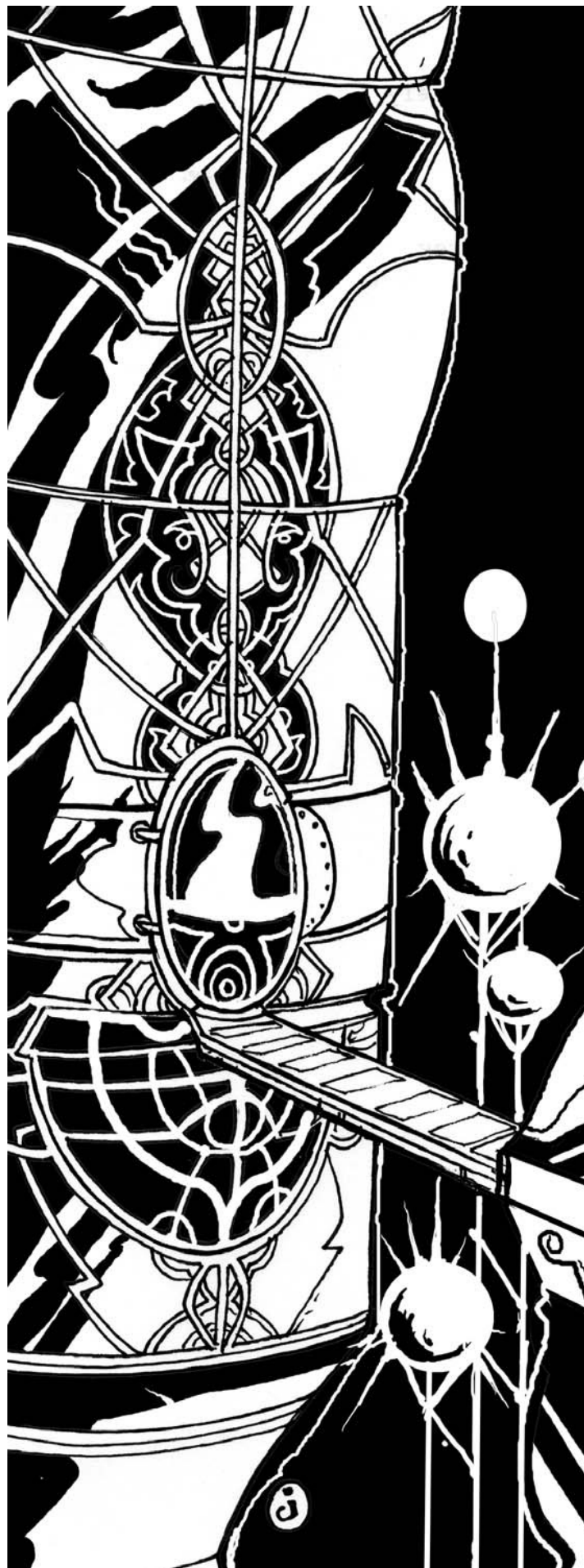
1. A barbarian tribe uses the petals of the snowflower in their coming of age ceremony. The petals are thrown on hot stones in the Tent of Men to send the youngsters of the tribe on a vision quest to discover their totem. This is the test of manhood that determines the role a young warrior will play in the tribe. Their shaman is missing on the mountain however and they dare not risk his apprentice, that would leave them with no shaman. They need someone to gather the petals for them so the next generation of warriors can become men. What has delayed the shaman though? Has he fallen, gotten lost or are the rumours of trolls in the mountain true?

2. The King is about to impose a duty on distilled alcohol across the kingdom and sides are being drawn up. Several small scale distilleries are going to be driven out of business and thieves' guilds are buying up their stills, ready to provide the sots of the kingdom with illegally produced booze. Meanwhile the King is creating a new division, excise men, charged with enforcing the tax, collecting the revenue and dealing with smuggling and illegal production. It's a big wage and the job has a lot of fringe benefits, something that may prove attractive to adventurers, as might the guilds' need for enforcers and smugglers.

3. The Cult of the Mask is undermining an important city. Their use of red lotus to addict and control people of importance and to reduce their servants to near mindless slaves is the crux of their power and while withdrawal is painful stopping their supply of red lotus is the only way to truly remove their power over the city and its institutions. The situation is far worse than the few uncorrupted nobles and merchants are willing to admit but that is what leads them to hire on the group to seek out and destroy the source of the red lotus, a flower not native to this land and that must be being imported or cultivated specially somewhere.

4. The son of a rich noble is hopelessly addicted to some substance or other produced, illegally, by one of the local thieves' guilds. His appetite for vice is legendary though this drug in particular has been swallowing up his fortune more than anything else of late. His father wants him cleaned up and respectable once more since this son is his heir and he feels the chilly hand of death upon his shoulder more and more. The players may be able to help, isolating and protecting the son for long enough that he can overcome his addictions and see what life can be without whoring and overindulging. Of course, his friends, The Fiend Club, a group of similar minded bon vivants, as well as the people he has spent all his money on, may have different ideas...

5. A powerful psychic has taken an heroic dose of a psychoactive drug recently brought up from the deep caves beneath the land and the strange psychic species that live there. It has flipped some switch in his mind and his powers have increased exponentially. Now the area in which he stays has been warped by his mind and is spewing forth monsters, mutated from the local wildlife and people by the nightmarish power of his mind. Someone needs to brave the madness infested lands and fight their way to its centre to confront him, though the deep underground may hold secrets and cures for what he has taken.



DRUGS IN SCIENCE FICTION

Science Fiction is a projection of the future but is usually written about the concerns of the here and now, speculating on the ultimate outcome of current trends. Those trends have included drugs several times and most notably during the heyday of the psychedelics. Many of the most revered and imitated writers of speculative fiction have been very heavy drug users themselves with many of them drawing great inspiration from the strange ideas that have occurred to them while under the influence. Equally they have all speculated to some degree on the use of drugs in the future from the regulation of behaviour to the use of chemicals in a combat role even to the use of drugs from trips within ones own consciousness and body to eliminate cancer.

Science Fiction allows us to explore alternative societies and even alien races with entirely different psychologies and approaches to everything, including drugs and enforcement around such substances. Pharmaceuticals, illegal and legal, are a fast developing and fast changing area of technology, something that allows a great deal of leeway for interpretation in various games – not to mention new types of technology that can create entirely new ways to experience altered states of mind either through methodology or delivery.

THE NOBLE SAVAGE

Even more so than in fantasy fiction science fiction often contains the myth of the 'noble savage'. A contrast with the mainstream and highly technological culture with a more simplistic outlook that is often revered in the book. The Ewoks of Return of the Jedi would be an example as would, despite their technological level, the Shikki of Barry B Longyear's short story *The Jaren*.

There is sometimes a feeling, a sensation, that despite any number of technological marvels that something of 'pure humanity' has been lost and these qualities are represented in SF by the nature of regressed humans or tribal, clan or family organised aliens. Part of this may be projected guilt from the harm the civilised peoples of the real world have done down history to more primitive and tribal peoples but it is a rich vein of conflict and thought to mine in gaming nonetheless.

Part of the process and appeal in such stories may be derived from the concept of 'going native' – something that happened fairly often in Victorian times with soldiers stationed to the wilder outposts of the British Empire disappearing into the local society, taking local wives and making new lives for themselves there. In many SF stories someone from the dominant technological culture becomes stranded on a more primitive planet and must ingratiate themselves with the locals. That can very much include being involved in their religious rites and the hero often has to perform a rite of passage in order to be accepted as one of the people.

Drugs are an obvious potential element to such an initiation.

Part of what is thought to have been lost in the existing information and techno-culture is a sense of spirituality and

connection and many hallucinogenic drugs, or those that increase empathy, can meet that demand – part of the reason that they are so popular in the first place. To a Science Fiction character finding themselves surrounded by tribal culture and ideas the drug taking and the sense of spirituality that comes from it may act as a complete revelation, overturning their previous ideas about the cosmos, science, religion and their place.

Another interesting idea in SF is to treat something more concrete and real in the setting as though it were merely tribal superstition and the result of drugs. What if the herb that the tribe smokes really does but them in touch with the gaia-mind of the plant-life of their whole planet or what if the trees really are their ancestors? Their memories available if the natives – or their guests – can simply 'tune in' on the right frequency with the help of chemical assistance.

NEW WAYS TO FUCK YOURSELF UP

Technology is often pushed forward, promoted and advanced by things that act on humanity's baser instincts and more primitive urges. Web technology is driven by the pornography industry to a large degree, leaps and bounds are made in many fields in an environment of war and it is not beyond the pale to think that many advances in chemistry can and will come about due to pharmaceutical recreation. Even limiting oneself to the pharmaceutical line is probably placing too many limits on the new and wonderful ways people will find to do interesting things to the minds and bodies.

Advanced scientific methods, genetic manipulation, nanotechnology and other more understandable technologies are not even the limit themselves when one considers the possibilities of teleporter or replicator technology or the manipulation of space and time all of which could be used to great effect in influencing the body and the mind for pleasure, sensory experience and mind expansion and it is more than likely that all these applications would be put to that purpose unless something is fundamentally and deliberately changed about human nature, physiology and urges in that time – something that is very possible.

Genetic manipulation might make people who can produce their own intoxicants and even 'milk' themselves to earn a living by selling it. Living creatures are very complex creatures capable of turning out very complex molecules; one need only look at the variety of venom that creatures manufacture or at spider silk to see that. A human body might be able to be manipulated to produce specific hormones, proteins or complex molecules especially tailored to have accurate and strong effects on the body and mind. Breeding a race of 'drug cows' seems extreme but post-conception or post-birth changes should be possible to a lesser degree, perhaps with the invention of entirely artificial and vat-grown organs.

Other manipulations may produce far stronger versions of current plant or animal based intoxicants. Giant cane toads that produce far more of their chemical high, GM 'super crops' of marijuana, opium or mushrooms or varieties crossbred and specially engineered to grow anywhere and to be extremely

hardy. Even bacteria could be turned into bioreactors taking in feeder solution and producing even very complex chemicals relatively cheaply and easily. Virii or bacteria could be engineered in a more hardy fashion so one could give themselves an 'illness' that would produce a high, even laying down bacteria in the digestive system that would produce a constant low-level effect - some of these 'recreational diseases' could even become infectious or be used as weapons of war.

Nanotechnology provides for other interesting possibilities. The manipulation of chemicals using nanobots acting on the molecular or atomic level will create a great deal more possibilities for ever more exotic chemicals, including drugs, ones that may not be cheap or practical produce in any other way. More directly nanobots in the bloodstream acting as cleaning and repair teams for the human body may allow someone to take stronger and stronger substances and doses without risk of death, allowing people to plumb the effects of more dangerous toxins and much higher concentrations of drugs than before. Even more directly again nanobots infiltrating the nervous system could be used to intensify or lessen certain stimuli, crosswire senses to produce synaesthesia or to temporarily simulate any number of sensory experiences, mental states or even insanities. Imagine being addicted to an emotion, an obsession or crosswiring someone's senses so that they get sexual gratification from performing repetitive and boring tasks.

Technologies that could break down and remake the human body such as transporter technology could also be abused to rewrite the shape and thought processes of the human organism into something entirely 'other'. One could experience and potentially remember what it is to live as other species or as something entirely different of our own design. We could build additional senses for ourselves and then scramble them with all the others to create newly intense sensations and psychedelic sound scapes.

With the decoding of the process of human thought even more esoteric possibilities become possible such as memes, reprogramming the human psyche with strange faiths and beliefs, implanting false memories and engineering the process of human thought itself. On the plus side many mental conditions, particularly those that are trauma based, could be cured by selective memory editing, on the downside powerful memes could be used to pacify a populace, convert them to a religion or to introduce compulsions for destructive or antisocial behaviour. Instant riot by a correctly coded strobe, people reprogrammed as sex slaves by the overwriting of their mental programs. Everything that can happen when our computers today get hijacked, and more.

On a more crude basis electromagnetic manipulation of the electrochemical processes in the brain might allow us to make 'mood guns' that could inflict a particular high or emotion upon people from a distance. Something like the *tasp* from *Known Space* and, no doubt, the orgasm-gun would be the most popular of these devices! More directly one could wire one's brain in the pleasure centres to be stimulated by a mild current, no purer pleasure would there be.

In the far future possibilities, the manipulation of space and time, one could still find ways to abuse that technology for fun and wild sensory experiences. One could scramble the time zones that signals move through the mind by expanding and contracting space or altering time so that things are seen before they occur and reacted to after they have happened, having people experience the past present and future all at once or working with senses that are completely out of synch with the real world beyond their eyes.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PSIONICS

Psionics are the 'magic' of science fiction games, their terminology and pseudo-scientific nature makes them more credible and easier to swallow within the technological and scientific settings of the games. Psi powers are also a quick and easy way to make aliens alien or to imply a degree of human advancement in unlocking these hidden abilities. Since humans do not already, arguably, have demonstrable or powerful psychic abilities sometimes a catalyst or trigger is required to have them become available. This can be contact with a psionic alien race, the development of genetic tinkering that unlocks the power of the mind, a particular discipline - such as *The Force* or drugs.

A psi-drug of some sort is a fairly common thread across a great deal of science fiction either to awaken the powers in the first place or to enhance the ability of a psi-powered individual in using their power. This all, of course, links back to a great deal of thought about hallucinogenic drugs - sometimes given some credit for bringing about human consciousness - and the spiritual/otherworld nature of chemical substances.

In a setting that has psionic powers, of any level, drugs of the appropriate type, or specially tailored psi drugs are a good addition to the setting of the game. Conventional drugs likely to provide some sort of bonus to psionic powers would be likely to be those that improve concentration or that induce a feeling of separation between mind and body. Psi drugs themselves might activate latent powers in non psionic individuals while taken, addicting them to the experience of telepathy or psychokinesis while burning out their weaker minds, unused to wielding such power.

Bonuses to psi powers from drugs would be similar - though perhaps more effective - than the effects already listed in the previous fantasy section.

ANTI-AGING DRUGS

Anagathic drugs are a whole different form of addiction altogether. The addiction to life itself through chemical longevity and with drugs of various kinds being an obvious story-method to introduce that, resonant as it is with the fountain of youth, celestial peaches, ambrosia and so on.

Longevity through drug treatments is another common thread in many science fiction stories from the spice of *Dune* to the treatments in the *Known Space* novels to the anagathic drugs of *Traveller* and the alien derived drug *Stookie* in *Judge Dredd* where it could only be harvested from intelligent aliens. The story question explored is so often what is immortality worth,

how much would you sacrifice for it and what is the economy of eternal youth?

Who wouldn't honestly prefer to live forever, by whatever means, rather than to face the uncertainties of faith at the point of death? SF offers many ways to outlive others from drugs to nanotech to cloned bodies and 'transferred engrams' but this can be viewed as the ultimate addiction, the addiction to existence itself, to sensation, to thought, to consciousness. If you think people will do anything to get their fix of heroin just look at a few of the extreme stories about what people have put themselves through in order to survive.

PLAUSIBLE DRUGS

The most logical approach to take with future drugs is probably to expand on and tighten up what drugs are capable of today. Their effect is likely to become more and more precise as delivery systems and understanding of brain/chemical interaction becomes more understood. As a result the effects are likely to be stronger and to have less side effects save where the effects of the drug are particularly profound. This can have various effects such as making drug use safe and ubiquitous to get the maximum potential from the human machine with pilots and other personnel on starships running their duties on a constant buzz. Safer and more effective effects from drugs may also, finally, lead to an effective and useful combat drug that doesn't necessarily turn the user into a raging maniac or destroy their body.

On the less savoury side drugs could be tailored especially for mind control or made so profoundly physically addictive that people would die without their regular supply. This would put them completely in the thrall of the pharmacologists and dealers that produce and supply such a narcotic.

Overall the keywords for plausible future drugs are safety, precision, strength and efficiency.

LEGALISATION

The legalisation issue would depend very much on the government of any nation, system or space station included in the science fiction game's setting. A lot would also depend on whether the game was set in the near future or the far future. So long as drug use messes up concentration and other faculties it is unlikely that recreational drug use will be acceptable in the military or merchant marine unless the drug is used during combat operations in the same way amphetamine is used by pilots now.

It is likely one would see a very broad spectrum of approaches to the drugs issue across different systems, species, ideologies and religions. Indeed with different species having very different physiologies to each other it is entirely possible that something innocuous to humanity could be like crack cocaine to another species, which only makes things more complicated, especially in multi-species alliances.

With drugs likely, in the main, to become less harmful it is tempting to think that this might lead them to become more

accepted, and thenceforth legal, in future societies. Drugs have become an emotive issue however and progress on that issue is glacial and unlikely to change for a very long time. If belief does shift on the issue it is likely to move back and forth several times before reaching any kind of resolution and given that nigh entirely safe drugs are illegal here and now it is unlikely that that will change any time soon.

Illegal drugs and interplanetary demand and smuggling make for great adventure hooks however and the use of legal stimulants, boosts and psi drugs within a setting can be very powerful at creating the atmosphere of a great deal of 60s and 70s science fiction writing. Combine the two sides, create an interesting source for the illegal drugs and think about the effect of legal and illegal narcotics upon alien societies and you'll already start to come up with great ideas for a game session.

STORY SEEDS

1. A group of pro-hemp/marijuana ecoterrorists release a geneered cannabis plant in the wild. This grows like crazy in the harshest conditions and is as strong as the strongest skunk weed. While the military and scientists attempt to deal with the fast growing weed the player group are hired to track down and eliminate the terrorists and retrieve their notes.
2. Following a distress signal they arrive on a greenhouse world filled with all manner of unusual life. The stranded person has 'gone native' with the local tribe and has become tied into them through their spiritual use of a drug that lets them speak to the 'trees'. The 'Mothers of us all'. The drug has biologically tied the man to the tribe and the land but he is needed off-world for the research he had conducted elsewhere.
3. Stargen Corporation has a contract to exploit and update an outlying agricultural world. Unfortunately it was settled by religious groups – without a taboo against technology but who desire a relaxed pastoral existence. They believe only in passive resistance but this has begun to include disruption using orgasm-guns. Some of Stargen's operatives have become addicted and it is driving up costs to the point where they are considering hiring mercenaries to enforce order. Choose a side...
4. An experimental psi drug designed to make permanent psychics, has escaped the lab. It is self-catalysing, designed to be taken only once and then to self-recreate in the people who take it. Unfortunately this hasn't been successfully regulated yet and the drug is self producing itself outside the lab. People across the planet are succumbing to unwanted psionic powers and going mad at the hubbub of telepathic static that they are hearing. Order needs to be maintained while an antidote is configured and dispensed.
5. Thanks to a conflict in the sector a fairly wealthy planet has been cut off from its normal supply of anagathic drugs. A great many wealthy people depend on this supply to remain alive so long past their 'three score and ten' and the denial of their drug supply is causing many of them to suddenly and catastrophically age. The planet could also use regular medical supplies but the big money is in anagathic smuggling, while the war endures.

DRUGS IN HORROR

Drugs have often played a role in the horror genre, used by protagonist and antagonist alike as well as being cinematic shorthand for 'you're going to die' with stoners coming in a close second to 'sex out of wedlock' couples in the slasher top 10. Drugs lend a surreality to horror and create possibilities that can influence the horror, was it an hallucination or was there really a killer clown lurking there a moment ago? Don't fall asleep; take speed or the pod people will get you! That man's a psychotic killer thanks to his brain being friend on too much LSD.

In the real world drugs have been used as a lure, a reward and a method of control by serial killers and rapists. The Manson Family is supposed to have been as much under the sway of narcotics as Manson's charisma and hallucinatory bad-trip type sequences have been a part of horror for a very long time, right up to the carnival-style acid trip of *House of 1000 Corpses*. Most of the characters in horror novels, even the heroes, are relatively unsympathetic and a drugs habit can be a literary shorthand of establishing a 'dirty' underside to character. In RPGs many characters given the option will take one or more addictions as flaws establishing their own dark side.

The dark side of many drugs is the bad trip, a walk through the darker and more terrifying side of the human psyche, the very place that many of our ideas of horror are dredged up from. Personal injury, the unsettling, the unexplained, gods and demons and monsters, insects under the skin and unnameable things beyond our comprehension and just beyond our sight. Horror books, horror games, horror films are all a safe way to dip our toe into this dark side of the unconscious but drugs can, potentially, give complete immersion in our own nightmares as well as our dreams.

IN HORROR THINGS ARE ALWAYS BAD

When introducing any element into a horror game it is important to remember that it is horror. Every plus should have a major minus attached to it. If you have sex you, her or both are going to die or otherwise get messed up by the monster. If you discover the truth behind the ghost she's going to come after you next. If you manage to slip away for a quick smoke you're going to end up with a slit throat.

With all that put into consideration then one can assume that any trips are going to be bad trips that drugs may well set off a psychotic episode in you and that, if you chill out with a spliff the murderer is going to choose that exact moment, when you're in a dope induced haze, to attack you. Drugs are always going to be a sordid and dangerous matter in the horror context and should offer no relief from the unremitting horror and insanity that waits around every corner – in fact, they should make things worse.



TERRORS OF THE SUBCONSCIOUS

Everyone has things they fear, things they cannot stand and drugs can dredge up these primordial fears from their back-brain and bring them to the fore, confronting people with the very things they cannot stand against. In horror this can also confuse matters between what is the real horror that is stalking them and what is their drug-induced paranoia. With the GM playing up to this way of thinking a player group can be left reeling and uncertain, unsure of what is real and what is not in the context of the game, a frenetic panic that can be very useful in setting up an appropriate horror atmosphere.

Reading up on the things people have done to themselves or the things they have seen while under the influence of drugs can give great inspiration for horror elements to throw into games. From urban myths about people who cut off their own penis at the command of god while under the influence to the disturbed scribbles, doodles and writings of people in the psychological stratosphere under the effect of LSD there is a rich vein of horror there to be tapped.

Horror is, to a very great extent, rooted in the irrational – our fear of the dark or of closed cupboard doors – even though we know for certain that the bogeyman doesn't exist and that there are no giant spiders under our bed. Drugs reach to that irrational part of people's minds, hence their links with spirituality and religion and it isn't so much of a difference between a spiritual rapture and the horror of night terrors – the drugged state not being too dissimilar to lucid dreaming.

This is the strength of drugs in a horror setting, to blur the line, to make the strange acceptable and to continue themes of horror, the unknown and the primitive mind.

STORY SEEDS

1. A drug brought in to an asylum for human testing has a very, very strange effect. While the inmates become temporarily somewhat sane, their delusions and hallucinations begin to manifest as real, clawing their way into the real world and causing all manner of horrific problems throughout the asylum. They're out now and they want to stay free, worse, they seem to be able to draw their 'brethren' from the minds of others.

2. A new street drug is finding its way to notoriety. Nobody is entirely sure what it is and analysis seems to indicate it shouldn't have any effect on people at all. Still, those who take it are acting as though possessed by something outside themselves. Something that some people in-the-know are describing as being similar to the Voodoo Loa.

3. A group of friends all share a trip and all experience or see the same strange and sinister 'something' during their experience. They're left shaken and changed by it but things really start to change when something begins to hunt them down, one by one, something they brought back with them.

4. The characters are taking a hiking holiday through a backwoods area when a classified military experiment is carried out on a Hicksville town in the area. Without much in the way of electricity or other amenities, including a decent road, the area is popular with mountain men and isolationists. People who won't be missed. The drug that is being tested is supposed to be something that can be used to spray over areas of insurgency to turn them against each other. In practice it turns the community into a crazed group of psychotic killers, some of which work together, and when they finish with the town they go hunting...

5. A backstreet chemist has just put the finishing touches to his latest and greatest creation and let it out on the streets for a test. As well as getting people high the drugs has unleashed their inner demons removing their empathy for others and any restrictions on their behaviour that their conscience might otherwise dictate. As the evening wears on the drug begins to take effect and those who have taken it begin to act strangely, eventually stalking the streets of the neighbourhood, seeking bloody revenge for even the slightest misdemeanour.



DRUGS • PLAYING

DISCLAIMER

I am in NO WAY WHATSOEVER encouraging you to use chemical enhancements while you are playing. I merely want to have an intellectual discussion about the potential positives and negatives of drugs used while playing, not in terms of characters, but of players. My own personal experience leads me to believe that taking drugs while playing is a phenomenally bad idea, not least of all because most games deal with assorted themes that would have a very negative effect on the outcome of hallucinogen trips. Additionally those under the effect of many, not all, drugs, find it hard to concentrate and to focus and drifting or OOC banter is far more likely.

Please take some personal responsibility, this is just a discussion not an endorsement, far from it.

POSITIVES

Let us look at the potential positives of drug use in gaming first shall we? Firstly 'performing' in front of other people is a stressful experience. Playing RPGs we are, in effect, performing in front of our friends. In tabletop this is a small group and a fairly forgiving audience but even so, it can be a nerve wracking experience. If this is true in tabletop it is far more true in LARP where one can have to speak in front of a large number of people at once.

In both of these contexts some kind of social lubricant, something to loosen people up and make them a little bit more social is useful, even a good idea. The British LARP scene just wouldn't be the same if the beer didn't flow like water whether it be rubber-swording or more sedate LARPS – many of which must be played in pubs, the landlords expecting you to drink. A little bit of alcohol gets overcomes some of people's reservations and gets them into the swing of things. A little bit of shared dope can do the same thing, relaxing people, getting them talking and sharing the experience of smoking a joint, forming a connection with each other and a point of reference with each other to take back into the game.

Other drugs that remove some of a persons inhibitions might also be good in this context, in fact many of the 'club drugs' typically taken for a good night out are taken for reasons that mirror the reasons one would want to take them for a gaming session – reasons of socialisation, confidence and relaxation. If the group is relaxed, confident and a little loosened up they are far more likely to have a good time and to get on with each other.

Hallucinogenic drugs are less obviously useful as the ability to do anything really meaningful or constructive under the influence of them is all but impossible. Extremely small doses or very mild forms of hallucinogen may help people get their imaginations into gear, helping them to visualise the scenes that the GM is creating. For the GM himself hallucinogenic drugs might well be a source of inspiration, all jokes about 'Were you smoking crack when you thought of that?' aside. A great many genre authors have drawn massive amounts of inspiration from their experiments with drugs and a GM is just a relatively

uncelebrated creative.

Of the other drugs those that improve concentration and alertness could, conceivably, provide some benefit in memorising, remembering and interpreting rules as well as staying up for very long, marathon sessions.

Overall, if one thinks of gaming sessions as social occasions then all the usual substances that allow such occasions to progress more smoothly in one manner or another may all have their uses.

NEGATIVES

The problem with using a substance to control your social behaviour is that drugs have an onset period and it can be very hard to judge at what point one slips from merely being relaxed and loose to being comatose or problematic. Drinking is, perhaps, the easiest one to take too far and drunken people are more likely to be argumentative and violent than people under the influence of most other substances. Disagreements over rules can become far more heated than they need to be and a slurring, staggering individual detracts massively from the atmosphere of the game around them.

With cannabis the problems are less acute but no less disruptive. Too much of that and you're a giggling, snoring heap, too distracted by anything and everything to give much thought to gaming at all. Indeed if anyone suggests taking a few bhong hits before you start playing you can pretty much kiss any gaming goodbye. It is thanks in no small part to this that smoking cannabis through a bhong has the local euphemism of 'playing Shadowrun'. Believe me, there is such a thing as 'too relaxed'.

Sometimes loss of inhibition can go too far and things can end up being said and done in front of people that you later regret. While a gaming session can have something of a party or social atmosphere to it, it is far less anonymous than an evening at the bar or a nightclub. The people you game with are likely people you consider friends, people you will see again and any personal embarrassment is likely to haunt you for far longer than just the morning after.

Hallucinogens and gaming, I think, are a very, very dangerous mix. While low doses might aid imagination and larger doses might provide inspiration I would very much recommend taking hallucinogens while gaming, even in those small doses. The effects of hallucinogens are amongst the most unpredictable of any drug and setting and mindset can greatly influence those effects. Many games deal with dark or violent subject matter and they encourage you to think as 'someone else'. The imagery and direction of these games is not, in my opinion, conducive to a good trip, no matter how much *The Lord of the Rings* ended up caught up in 60s and 70s psychedelic movements. I would definitely not play a modern occult or horror game under the influence of psychedelics as that is very likely a recipe for some serious mental problems.

The drugs that improve concentration and provide energy, such as amphetamines, will also tend to cause mania and fast, garbled and inconsequential speech. None of which are particularly

things that will help in gaming, for all they might help with rules understanding and retention.

As well as the immediate problems that can be caused by misuse or overindulgence one should also consider the effect that drug taking can have on the community. Old links between gaming and Satanism may have been undermined but drug use could just as easily be used as a stick to beat gaming with and there have been recent attempts to link role-playing with paedophile activity. Do be careful and don't credit people with intelligence and tolerance that they don't have.

Lastly I would consider that a regular gaming session that included drugs as part of the 'ritual' could very much contribute to addictive behaviour by establishing a habit, linked to the drugs along with a pleasurable leisure activity – reinforcing the role of the drug more than a little.

COMING SOON

'45 - 'Bettie Page: Road Warrior'. What if WWII had been fought with atomic weapons and the thoughts about radioactivity from old B-Movies had been correct? B-movie kitsch in a rockabilly pulp apocalypse!

All These Worlds... - Modular expansion/replacement for OGL Future games.

Three's An Orgy - Expansion for the notorious card game Hentacle.

NEXT ISSUE

VIOLENCE

AUTOPSY 3