

WIZKID: CANTRIP-COMPREHENSIVE

'45: THE-PUKES-OF-DANGER

BLOODSUCKER: THE-OUROBOWRONG

4E: GROIN-WEASELS

BLOOD: TIPS/ERRATA

FLENSER-SWARM-4-PATHFINDER

INVADERZ!

GRIM'S-TALES

'BETA-PLANET'

5078



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**POSTMORTEM  
STUDIOS**

For use with the 4th Edition

**DUNGEONS  
& DRAGONS**  
ROLEPLAYING GAME

Requires the use of the D&D Player's Handbook, Monster Manual, and Dungeon Master's Guide, Player's Handbook 2, Monster Manual 2, Adventurer's Vault core rulebooks, available from Wizards of the Coast, LLC

## GSL

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## Introduction

With this issue Autopsy shifts its focus to becoming more general and less thematically tied. With original articles and support – primarily for Postmortem Studios games and those it supports – and general articles about role-playing and related gaming issues.

Most of the articles will be retools, rewrites and expansions upon ideas and concepts that are first presented in our company blog. Some will be completely new but you will see these articles being better explained and expanded, hopefully more useful and complete than the blog articles which are, by and large, about throwing ideas out there and seeing what sticks.

If you've written blogs or items for any of our games you're welcome to submit them for publication and you will get paid – albeit a modest amount – if we decide to take them up. The main reason for the change and the resurrection of Autopsy as a magazine is to offer deals and to keep open lines of communication and support for our games in a way that, perhaps, has not been possible in the past. Here at Postmortem we tend to get excited about the next thing and to move on, without necessarily giving the level of support and assistance that people have come to expect, even for Indie games.

We hope this is going to help increase communication and feedback and we're always open to your ideas and comments on any of our games so, please, do feel free to write to us, mail us, leave messages on Facebook, Twitter, the blog or anywhere else you want. It'll all get read and absorbed.

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### Agents of SWING



**Agents of SWING** is a Spy-Fi action game using the FATE system. Fast cars, faster women, gambling, fine wine and back home in time for tea and medals. 1/3 off.

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**Courtesans** is the game of competing paramours in the world of Georgian high society. It is a companion game to **Tough Justice** and **Doxy**. A structured story game you can get it for 1/3 off.

### Cloak of Steel



**Cloak of Steel** is a game of fantasy mecha on a detailed and well realised fantasy world of nations on the brink of war. Can you be a hero and protect the cities? This game is under development for a new edition and you can get a preview of the background - if not the rules - for a measly \$1.99!

## RPGs as Architecture

There's an ongoing, and somewhat histrionic, argument going on (constantly) between two approaches to RPG gaming.

On the one hand you have those who might be called 'traditional' gamers (or less charitably 'Fatbeards') who tend - it seems - to view RPG games as *purely* games and tend to take offence at the idea that they even *could* be art. On the other side you have the avant garde and Indie gamers (or less charitably the 'pretentious') who *do* view RPG creation and play as, *potentially*, art.

To me, RPG creation seems to be one of those things where a variety of skills and outlooks are required. RPG play can be an artistic accomplishment and experience in play, just as much as it can be a straightforward play experience and not be art. It all depends on the group creating the game and their experience in playing it. Unlike most art the audience are also the creators and an artistic game experience is not one that it's necessarily possible to share with others successfully

In creating an RPG you are required to draw on creative, non-engineering skills (layout, writing, artistic direction, theme, mood) as well as more constructive skills (creating a system that works mechanically as well as aesthetically). Creating the games themselves can certainly be an act of artistic creativity and, in trying to think of other fields where you had this sort of combination it occurred to me that RPGs are a good comparison with architectural design.

Is architecture art? People seem to argue over that question almost as much as they do about RPGs but there's no argument that some buildings absolutely are artistic statements and many architects would argue that this is in large part due to the experience of people interacting with the building. On the one hand it is a creative skill, but you are often hemmed in by the desires of your clients, the possibilities of the materials that you use and, while you might stamp a personal touch onto a building, once it's complete you have no real say over what happens within it and people may use it for all sorts of things you hadn't originally envisioned. You can end up with something beautiful and inspiring – as a building – but it may be filled with tacky shops and used as in impromptu skate park. It's out of your control.

To me, that's very much like crafting an RPG. You're not creating something whole, you're creating a space, an arena, a context in which people are going to play. You might define some parts of the world, you might design mechanics with a specific theme and mood in time, you might be careful in selecting art for the work but in the end it has to fend for itself and people will use it as they wish to. Just because you designated an area to be a border of flowers, doesn't mean someone won't let their dog shit there and just because you've designed mechanics to represent a cinematic 'reality' doesn't mean people won't alter that to be more deadly.

I think comparisons with novels or plays aren't really valid, perhaps when it comes to improvisation, but otherwise not, but I do think RPGs can be art in both creation and in play, not high art perhaps but involving, inspiring and joyful all the same. Creating a game is both *art* and engineering, it requires both sets of skills to create a game that is effective as a complete whole and there must be a sweet spot somewhere between the engineered boardgame nature of more old fashioned design and the thematically straitjacketed artistic vision approach of the new wave.

The designer can make the book art, they can make the writing art, they can commission art for their book but they can't make the gaming experience art, or stop it being art. That decision, that accomplishment, that goal is down to the end users. The people who end up playing the game.



# Grim's Tales

## Introduction

Practically every RPG book ever written contains some written advice for the Games Master, the guy or girl who carries the can and the responsibility for a good session largely on their shoulders. This advice is manifold and somewhat helpful but somehow the play examples and the sorts of problems that the Games Master might encounter don't ring particularly true and none of the big problems I've had in my games have ever been dealt with by any advice section I've ever read.

This has improved a little over time, the 4e D&D DMs guide has a much better section on dealing with the differing demands of different players but never explicitly points out that they're being an actual problem. It just treats it all very softly-softly and nicely-nicely as it being a clash of different tastes and gaming expectations that isn't really anybody's fault.

No.

Sometimes the player is *just* being an arsehole and needs a dry-slap and to be told to stop being a wanker. There's all sorts of problems that can't be dealt with with a cleansing breath and rubbing crystals and there's issues that people often have to deal with that conventional GM guides wouldn't touch with a bargepole.

Even with these improvements the books have never tackled the sorts of problems I've had as a Games Master. They've never told me what I should do if it's 3am, we're playing a marathon session and one player out of the group falls asleep while the rest are still up for it and into the story.

They've never told me how to handle it if the group has one too many bhong hits and gets a giggle-fit in the middle of a serious scene or what to do if one of them passes out and sticks his character sheet to his face with drool.

There hasn't been so much as a hint of how to stay impartial when one of your players is cute and is coming onto you, certainly not if they're doing it with the express desire to get something out of it in the game.

There's not been any clue as to how to let down a larper gently about the crapness of their costume or the horrifying morphological transformation that their corset has done to their body.

In short, then, the sort of Games Master advice one gets in RPG books is like passing your driving test. Sure, now you can drive the car from 'A' to 'B' but you've been given no hint as how to handle a car full of swearing drunken people trying to shove you off the road, what to do if a child vomits on your neck from the back seat while you're on the motorway or whether you're allowed to take a piss on the hard shoulder.

We all need real and practical advice sometimes and these articles will try to deal with some of the real problems that GMs – and players – encounter in real-life gaming groups, rather than the sort of 'Gaming with Dick & Jane' items we find in our gaming manuals.



## My Gaming History

### Imaginative Play

Growing up I was surrounded by books and my dad and my grandmother were teachers. Almost all my immediate family were bookworms and my dad had a consuming interest in science and, along with that, in science fiction. I still have most of his old paperback classics of the 70s and 80s in my bookcase (Why don't they still make those short paperbacks I ask you? Why does everything have to be a Hamiltonian or Eddingsesque brick?).

I was encouraged to be creative and to let my imagination fly and I was also surrounded by beautiful countryside, the very countryside that inspired Tolkien, Lewis, Adams, Grahame, Carroll and Milne. It was a fortunate childhood and I'm fortunate enough to find myself in the same surroundings again now, even as I'm writing this (though it's not exactly convenient for the shops or for getting a gaming group together – more on this later).

In short, it would have been a miracle if I hadn't grown up into the creative whackjob I am today, despite the best efforts of schools and others to crush it out of me.

Like most children I got my first taste of 'role-playing' without even realising what it was, we would play out Star Wars or James Bond in the school playground, occasionally – under the threat of kooties – we would be forced to play house with the girls or some vague fantasy thing involving princesses and unicorns where it was never, quite, clear what the whole thing was about.

Unlike the other kids I wasn't also interested in football and my interest in imaginative games lasted long after most of the other kids had decided they ought to 'grow up' – around age ten or so – and that they didn't want to play army and run around the woods like a mad thing any more. More fool them.

Looking back on it I can see the evolution of my interests towards role-playing proper and it's, really, as a sort of a justification to continue playing games long after the others around me had, instead, gotten into football, pop music, girls, studies, work and – ultimately – babies. The structure and the study that goes into it is, basically, an excuse and a method to continue that child-like play at make-believe and to ward off the barbs of critics, not that this always works and not that I'm saying this is a bad thing, not by any means.

I remember one game, a transitive moment in fact, very clearly. Myself and a friend had been dragged into playing one of the girly games (under threat of The Dreaded Lurgy) but had hit upon the idea of making it far more interesting to us, as boys, by playing at being knights – knights and princesses go together after all. We galloped around the school doing our best impressions of riding on horseback, something which, on reflection, probably resembled a cross between 'I'm a little teapot' and skipping and loudly proclaiming that we 'Must save the princess'.

That was a mistake.

As we passed one of the older children teapot-skipping and dramatically declaring our intent to save the damsel from the dragon, he turned and – with sarcasm I have yet to hear equalled, so withering that it instantly aged me two years – said 'Oh yes, we muuuuusst'.

Instantly we felt like the most foolish creatures in existence and stopped skipping, sheepishly creeping away to go and play British Bulldog instead to reaffirm the existence of our penises. For all I know the poor girl is still there waiting for her knights in shining armour to save her from the dragon.

As role-players, I feel that we need to recognise – and even be proud of – the fact that we're playing, that we're persisting in what children do. We dress it up in rules and shared game-worlds and canonical reference but really, at heart, it's still playing. All that other gumph is just our armour against sarcastic bullies and it works very well indeed.

## Telling Stories

The other thing I did when I was young was to tell stories and tall tales. Not lying as such, just 'going off on one' and spinning yarns, making stuff up and wittering away happily to myself or to any audience that would listen, walls, chairs, the cat or – eventually – my schoolfriends. I would even read to them from a boy's comic at the time called 'Spike', which ran various weird stories under the title '5 Minute Mystery' inside it. 2000AD was always the superior comic but the text stories in Spike were better for this.

There was no interaction as such, but I would improvise and add to the stories and when the other kids asked questions I'd make up the answers and weave them into the story. This is a lot of what a Games Master does, though when you're GMing this happens during the flow of the game, not afterwards. Weaving a story, keeping it cohesive, it's a lot like lying and keeping your story straight under constant cross-examination.

From there, things got interesting as I started to make up the basis for our make-believe games. Sure they were unholy blends of the various films, books, comics and so on I'd consumed but the other kids would play along and seemed to think some of these games were 'cool' enough to play along with... in fact, writing that's a startling revelation to me because, shame of shame, it makes me realise that one of my first RP-Like experiences could be termed... \*choke\*... LARP!



## Fantasy Fighting

The Fighting Fantasy game books were a revelation but, unfortunately, I don't remember where I got my first one. It was a slightly younger guy, Russell, at school who was really into them, more than I was. He had every single last one of them at the time and used to loan them to me and I'd play through them over a couple of days; apart from Starship Traveller, which like many people I never finished, whether there's any truth to the rumour that it was broken or whether it was simply bastard-fucking-hard I still don't know, but even cheating I never got through it.

Even before we knew what was going on we began reading the books to each other, one person reading the text and one person playing the part of the hero and making the decisions and the rolls for him. We quickly began to get frustrated though, FF game books suffered from the same problem that computer games still do, your choices were limited and even things that made perfect sense you couldn't do, or even attempt. Then Fighting Fantasy, Titan and Out of the Pit came along. Suddenly it all made sense, we could do whatever we wanted, so long as it held together. Of course, we didn't quite grasp the idea of making up our own adventures, at least not straight away.

It's safe to say that Fighting Fantasy – and later Dragon Warriors – were the 'ZX Spectrum' of British Role-playing. Where that computer gave us a cottage industry of bedroom programmers who later went on to create a world-beating computer games industry, so FF gave us the beginnings of the quirky and eccentric British RPG industry and, for me, my first steps into genuine role-playing and some of my ideas about what makes a good adventure, traps, settings and the overall 'feel' of a fantasy adventure.

## In at the Deep End

Unlike the enormous and overwhelming majority of gamers in the world, I didn't start 'proper' role-playing with Dungeons & Dragons. I wasn't even aware that Dungeons & Dragons existed for quite some time. When I went out looking for a proper RPG, in a shopping area that doesn't even exist any more, I gravitated immediately to Middle Earth Role-playing (or MERP) by Iron Crown Enterprises because I loved The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings so much, even at that young age.

Anyone who knows anything about MERP knows that it was basically just a 'lite' (Ha ha ha...) version of Rolemaster, one of the most baroque, complex and inaccessible RPGs in existence. Unbowed by almost completely not understanding the rules I threw myself into playing it with my customary gusto and it was my role-playing game of choice for many years.

That might well surprise people, since I seem to be somewhat associated with the 'New Style' or 'rules lite' system movement, these days somewhat inappropriately called 'Indie', but then perhaps grappling with 'Rulesmaster' all those years gave me a greater appreciation for the possibilities of stripping back the rules to get at a more 'pure' gaming experience. Even so, MERP taught me a huge amount about creating a good game world, about making it consistent, keeping the mood of the material and learning to expand on it in an appropriate way. It also put me completely off using figures and maps to the point where I never really used them again until very recently.

After that things turned into a bit of a blur, game after game, willing to play just about anything, but there's some, particular, stand-out games that I think have informed me and helped make me into the gamer and writer I am today.

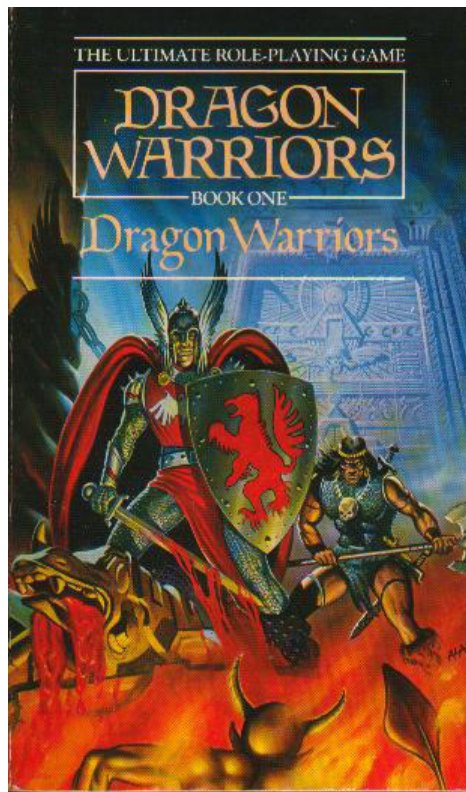
- **Dragon Warriors:** A very simple system and spread across several books, Dragon Warriors was important for a couple of reasons. Firstly it was sold in paperback format (a shame the new edition wasn't, though it is great) and secondly it really went for the mythological, British feel to the background, even more so than Fighting Fantasy. The mini-adventures in the backs of the books were also of excellent quality for the time.
- **Cyberpunk 2013:** If Cyberpunk hadn't laid the foundation none of the 'stylish' games that came along later in the 90s could have really existed. 2013 also tried for a realistic combat system and while success was mixed, it helped show how system could guide player behaviour.
- **Cyberpunk 2020:** A massive improvement in presentation and a progression in system showed that new editions could genuinely improve upon older ones. Cyberpunk 2020 was played for years and years in my group and we still return to the game and the system for near future and transhumanism themed games. It's just a real shame CP3.0 let the legacy down.
- **Blood!:** Blood! won me back to system-heavy games through the critical hit tables and in the way it played, showing me that a system heavy game could still come through and create an engaging and immersive game, especially in terms of survival horror. I loved it so much I resurrected the game under license.
- **Over the Edge:** Going the opposite way to Blood! this amongst the vanguard of 'rules lite' and showed how it could really work well. Characters defined very simply in a setting where you can literally play anything. Challenging as a Games Master and inspirational from a design point of view I still go back to it for inspiration, especially in packing a setting with plot hooks.



- **Vampire: The Masquerade:** A revelation in its time in terms of presentation, graphic design and the focus of the game upon story and narrative over killing things and taking their stuff. No matter how it actually ended up being played. Arguments can rage back and forth over whether the system married up to the intention and the nWoD is a crushing disappointment compared to the oWoD but Vampire did break the mould and did make role-playing genuinely cool for a while. Plus it led to me meeting my wife. Score!
- **Mage: The Ascension:** Mage was the apex of the Storyteller system and ethos for me, it was downhill after Mage 2nd Edition. A magic system that was inspirational, freeform and could cope with all the different ideas, a sandbox environment and a cosmology that tied together the previously disparate WoD games. Mage was a work of art and damn near perfect, inspirational for working on systems that 'build themselves'.
- **Feng Shui:** Feng Shui is a masterpiece of genre emulation and most of it done with only a couple of rules, one of them being stunts. The freeform play and the stunt system, combined with the mood setting book combined to create a clear vision of play.
- **Legend of the Five Rings:** L5R is something of a strange game, a fantasy Japan, but that excuses some of the strangeness. The inspirational nature of the setting, its detail and the reasonably loose metaplot allowed me to create my most successful 'epic scale' campaign yet.

- **Unknown Armies:** After the occult/horror glut of the 90s had seemed to drain that well dry Unknown Armies managed to claim it back a bit and give it a fresher outlook. The horror/sanity system therein was also an inspiration, an improvement on the age old Cthulhu sanity system without rendering it much more complex. Unknown Armies re-enthused me to the whole genre and showed there were still new spins on the theme yet to be tapped as well as room for more 'conventional' design to do the business.

**HeroQuest:** When we wrote Neverwhere we kind of got ahead of some of the ideas in HeroQuest, the definition of characters by their description. HeroQuest showed me this could work in a more structured game and with a more defined rules than we'd gone for. It also introduced a new level of abstraction to conflict resolution in a way that felt acceptable and useful.



## LARP

I desperately wanted to like Live Action Roleplay, I really did. I used to dream of going to Labyrinth in Chislehurst caves and would covet the shiny LARP weapons and costumes but there's certain aspects – at least of the active, physical LARP scene – that just don't really work for me and spoil the experience.

Sure, the immersion is closer to total without too much in the way of rules getting in the way, the experience has much more direct 'fidelity' but that can also be part of the problem. Your imagination always outstrips even the best attempts at costuming and it's very hard to mentally edit out a Scout Hut and superimpose a gigantic, spired castle. The other big problem I have with LARP is that it stifles my opportunity to play things that I am *not*. If I'm a ten stone weakling with the physical coordination of an epileptic jellyfish it doesn't matter what it says on my character sheet, Joe the Kobold is going to beat seven shades of shit out of me and then give me such a continued drubbing that an eighth shade will be discovered in the aftermath and named in my honour.

Nonetheless, I pressed on despite these misgivings and decided to give it a try. That just cemented in my mind that LARP wasn't for me after I was smacked in the face one too many times and fell knee-deep into a stinking bog in the woods. My refined and comfort-loving sensibility just doesn't seem to fit with the necessities of serious LARPing and my budget doesn't really stretch to buying suits of armour I'll only ever wear once a month.

That's not to say I'm disparaging LARP, if you can overcome these drawbacks and enjoy it, or even revel in it, then more power to you. It's just not quite my thing. I'm jealous if anything!

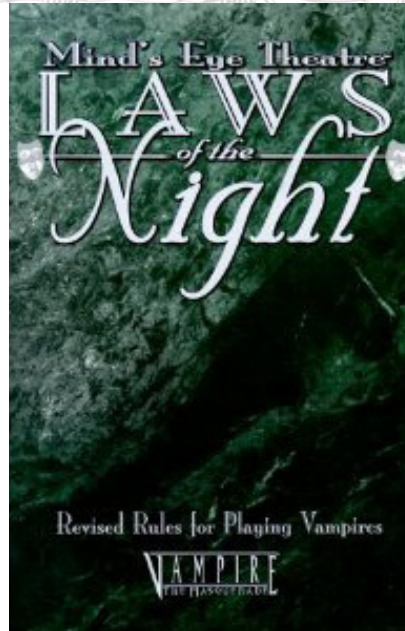
My next encounters with LARP didn't come along until the salon styleLARPs of Vampire the Masquerade and friends. Now, here was some LARPing I could actually get into. With a system base that allowed me to play something that I was not (though I sympathise with people who have all the scheming instincts of a lobotomised hamster). We were playing indoors, nobody got hit and it gave me an excuse to buy some clothes I *could* wear on the weekends and go out in. This was far more my speed and, considering my extended tabletop group was hitting thirty or forty people at this time, the progression to LARP made sense.

For a long, long time this seemed like the perfect solution to LARP for me, it was self perpetuating, big, once we joined The Camarilla fan organisation we were part of a huge international continuity that seemed to contain limitless possibilities.

Big mistake.

It started out that way and for quite a while it was great, but as with all organisations – especially those filled with creative people – there began to be problems. I'm still a huge fan of shared universes but when you're trying to get so many different play styles to work together in one place and so many people have different interpretations of the source material then there's going to be trouble, especially when they insist on 'one way only' and end up taking all the organisational positions of power through attrition and the Peter Principle.

The Camarilla died a living death as the result of its own bureaucracy, dogmatism, arguments and takeovers from White Wolf that never bore fruit and the whimpering end to the oWoD. Nothing's really come along to replace it since and more's the pity.



What I took away from my experiences with LARP were a love of props and tactile gaming, an admiration – tempered with concern – for people who enjoy being smacked in the face and a profound sense of frustration at the squandered opportunities that The Camarilla represented to me and how a very few rotten apples can destroy a whole orchard of fun.

The lasting influence from LARP, for me is that – in serious games – I aim for plausibility, a different thing to realism, and – I think – a better appreciation of how plots, schemes and other social interactions actually play out in a social context. Writing plots and stories for live-action games is a very different animal to writing for tabletop games but you can apply lessons from each to each other. LARPs are healthier when they concentrate on external enemies and allow the players to work together, tabletop games benefit from giving the players latitude to play out their characters and attention to personal plotting alongside the main storyline.

My LARP experience may have ended badly, but it was absolutely worth having.

## Online Gaming

I started early with online gaming, not just serial-connecting together a couple of Atari ST computers in different rooms – that barely counts – but using a creakingly old 2600 modem to get that same Atari ST to hook up to Avalon, a pay-to-play MUD, though I never progressed very far and fell afoul of one of the moderators, playing the 'God of Justice' when I said 'TANJ' and meant it. As it turned out there wasn't, as he repeatedly turned me to stone, exploded me and otherwise used his moderator powers to fuck with my character sheet in a manner that would get you sued for psychological assault these days.

That – and the expense – put paid to my online forays for a while, at least until the days of the 56k modem (and then cable) came around and something Science-fictionary rather than the same ol' fantasy came along. That's when I dived into Anarchy Online for another dabble in online play. The world was engaging, the music great, it was crippleware on launch but it really catered to role-play with nightclubs, clothing and RP props which, of course, the overwhelming majority of the populace never used. I ended up falling out of love with Anarchy Online almost as quickly as I had fallen in love with it to start with, because of the community.

I continued to dabble a little bit here and there and I got my online RPG fix mostly from IRC play and e-mail play through The Camarilla. While characters were able to jet-set their way around the world us poor players couldn't, so online play was a good compromise whereby you could get some players and a Storyteller together and play out your international scenes without any real problems. That seemed to work well since the Mind's Eye Theatre rules were fairly light and easy to use, attempts to play other RPGs over the internet weren't quite such a resounding success, fiddliness of rules and dice rolls, coupled with the relative slowness of text chat really slow things down to the point where it's almost impossible to play. For social RP it works fine, but anything too heavy or structured and it seems to break down very quickly.

Then along came the game that would actually manage to drag me back into what I had presumed to be an RP vacuum, Ryzom. The Saga of Ryzom is a French-developed MMORPG with a truly alien world – Atys – and a very freeform style of play. The world is indescribably gorgeous and the storyline – what was revealed of it – was interesting and still took a back-seat compared to the player actions. Virtually everyone there RPed to some extent and role-playing events actually attracted people to play them. There were no quests or missions, you set your own goals, did your own socialising and somehow it all just worked.

Of course, the problem there was that they launched at the same time as EQII and World of Warcraft and, thinking they could also make a hojillion dollars, the company tried to follow suit with the big success story. Bringing in PvP, some heavy handed metaplot and otherwise boning the existing RP community within the game with badly thought out measure after measure. They tried to claw them back with a half-hearted 'create your own mission' add on called The Ryzom Ring, but it was too late and they went bankrupt. Since then the game has been through another owner that didn't seem to know what to do with it either and it's now been bought again, but seems to still be making the same mistakes, this time adding a quest structure overlay and cosmetic changes.

Still, for a brief moment there was the holy grail, an MMORPG where people actually role-played! I was so enamoured of the game at the time I got hooked into doing volunteer service for it and created some plotlines and missions for the system, moving the story forward. I got hooked. Here was a way of bringing role-playing to a mass audience and it was fantastic.

Since Ryzom went pear-shaped I've tried a few other games, but nothing yet has matched up to Ryzom at its height. Lord of the Rings Online is steeped in Tolkien's lore and a fun game to play, but there's no RP aside from cybersexing fiends in the Prancing Pony. I play World of Warcraft with some friends but there's no RP there, it's more like a team sport. I hear Star Wars Galaxies used to be open and RP oriented, but that's died a death and was changed in the WoW gold rush. It remains to be seen whether the new Star Wars universe MMO measures up.

I think they're missing a trick in MMORPGs, there's definitely a niche of creative people who want something more from their games, a lot of them seem to migrate to Second Life (and I don't just mean the furies and sexual deviants) but they'd probably play a properly done, RP heavy game where they were invested in what went on.

If such a thing existed.

Everything is moving online and, lately, I've been working with various companies, trying to inject some of that creative, RP sensibility into types of game that's even less obviously welcoming to it than MMORPGs, the social media 'app' game, with mixed success.

There's definitely some sort of sweet spot here and some new audiences to be reached by RPGs. Forums and social sites are full of 'RP' forums with people re-living Twilight, 'Playing house', engaging in cybersex of the most creative sorts and playing RPGs without really understanding or knowing that they are playing RPGs.

Gaming's not dead, it's changing and so are people's expectations of what a game is, or should be. That's something even traditional RPG Games Masters need to be aware of, as well as games companies.

## Where Next?

Where is there to go from here? Where next? The internet continues to increase in importance for gaming to the point where World of Warcraft – derived from D&D and Warhammer – has all but completely replaced D&D in the public consciousness. Gaming is different, more widespread and more scattered, but there's still things that the new gaming can learn from the old in terms of player participation, storyline, role-playing, plot and characters.

A good, effective way to play traditional RPGs over the internet is needed, the current options being unwieldy, over technical or vapourware. The existing online games need an injection of the 'traditional values' of old-skool roleplaying games and some old-skool roleplaying games need to be made to try and cater to the new, online situations. Games that can be played over IRC or voice chat without getting bogged down or that make the nature of forums and chatrooms a boon rather than a hindrance.

For me my gaming and my work is pushing more and more in the direction of online, PDF publishing, forums, social media, MMORPGs, Wiki, chatrooms... the internet provides a perfect medium for updated, traditional RPG gaming if it can be properly harnessed and that's what I'm seeking to try and accomplish, as a writer, as a designer, as a player and as a Games Master.



# 4e: Groin Weasel

*With an ear-splitting squeal of glee a lightning fast blur of fur appears out of nowhere, streaking from your attacker and spiralling up your leg, disappearing into your clothing in a flash of teeth and claws.*

## Groin Weasel

**Level:** 1 Controller  
Small natural animal  
**XP:** 100

**Initiative:** +4

**Senses:** Perception +5; Low-light vision.

**HP:** 28 **Bloodied:** 14

**AC:** 17 **Fortitude:** 14 **Reflex:** 17 **Will:** 14

**Speed:** 8

**Bite:** (Standard, at-will) +6 Vs AC 1d6+2

**Groin-Grip:** (Standard, at-will, sustained against a single target) +5 Vs Reflex

The Groin Weasel charges up inside the clothing of the target and bites them on the groin. If the attack is successful it does normal bite damage, as above, and the Groin Weasel makes another attack at +5, this time against the target's Fortitude Save. If the Groin Weasel succeeds, the stricken character is rendered immobile and unable to attack or defend themselves, due to the exquisite agony of having a weasel attached, by the teeth, to their groin.

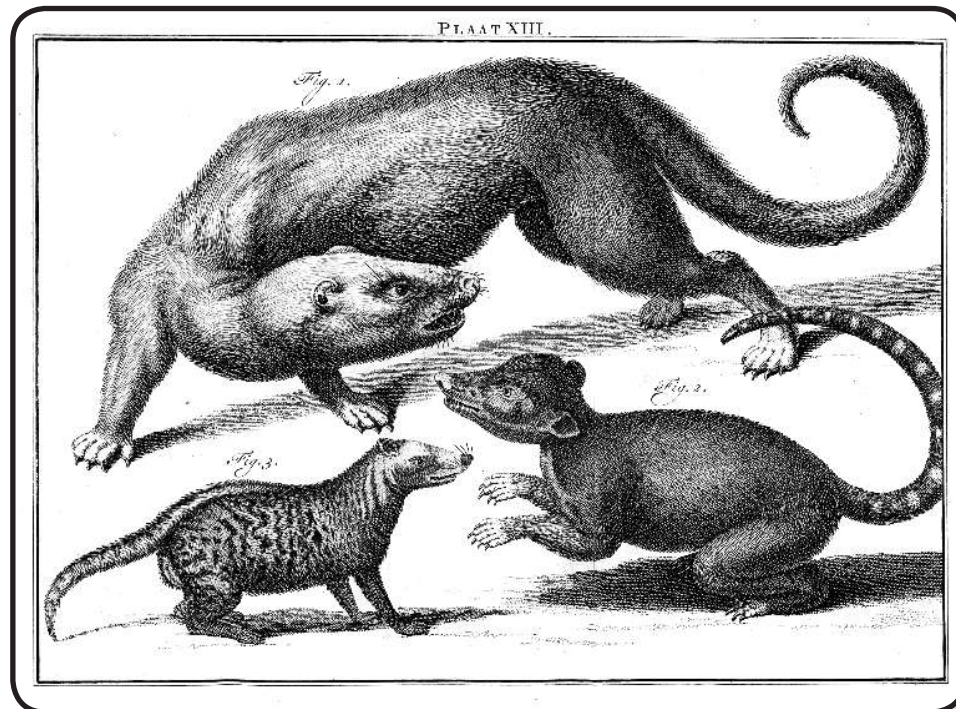
Removing the Groin Weasel requires either killing it (missed attacks hit the character to whom the weasel is attached) or pulling it off. Removing the Groin Weasel in such a way is a Strength contest (d20 + Strength bonus) against the Weasel's Strength, though the Weasel gets a +1 bonus for its sharp teeth being sunk into flesh (Straight d20 roll). Each failed attempt, no matter how many there are, causes the standard bite damage again.

**Str:** 8 -1 **Dex:** 19 +4 **Wis:** 12 +1 **Con:** 12 +1 **Int:** 2 -4  
**Cha:** 8 -1

The dread Groin Weasels are specially trained by the Rangers of Northern Albion to attack and cripple their enemies, allowing the Rangers to, then, pick them off at their leisure. Groin Weasels are vicious, nasty, evil little bastards who are only kept in check by regular treats of rabbit innards.

On command they leap forth from the Rangers sleeve, backpack – or specially constructed wicker box, streak like lightning towards the enemy and attach themselves tightly, by the teeth, to their genitalia, refusing to let go without being killed.

Deadly and feared, the Groin Weasel has become a favourite familiar for magic users who are sick of having sand kicked in their faces by mighty Barbarians and by Rangers who like sitting targets they can turn into pincushions. A groin weasel and a Ranger make a deadly combination.



# GM Tips for Blood!

Blood! is a rules-heavy game, which can be a bit daunting in this modern age of rules-lite games that don't take anywhere near as much preparation. It's a percentile based game with a lot to keep track of, if you choose to track everything. People seem to feel that this might detract from the horror aspect, which is something that I don't feel is entirely fair.

- **Scarcity:** A lot of survival games on consoles and computers play up scarcity as a means of ramping up tension. For them it's about ammunition and health packs, in Blood! it's about hit points and blood points. The fact that they're relatively scant and can be annihilated quite rapidly means you can use the statistics as a tool to intensify tension, horror and risk.
- **Kill the bastards:** Do *not* be afraid to kill characters. Indeed it's hard not to in Blood! Even if you're playing a campaign, kill, be ruthless, it's a horror game. That'll make those lucky survival moments all the better and all the more meaningful.
- **Improvise:** There's rules for a lot, but once you get a handle on what damage things tend to do it's really just percentile roles. You can pull that out of your arse along with unspecified modifiers, no problem.
- **Smoke & Mirrors:** You don't need as much prep as you think. Use average stats for monsters and NPCs and just change how you describe things. Shift five percent around here and there, bump up or down HP from the average standard and you've got as much change as you really need, most of the time.



- **Use the Crits as a Guide:** Blood!'s critical hits are notorious, gory and cover a hell of a lot of ground, but even so they will get repetitious after a while. Use the descriptions and the kinds of wounds as a guide rather than an absolute. Keep the mechanics and switch up the descriptions a bit.

## Official Errata

- **Clarification:** A character can hold up to double their base actions in actions, or 5 actions, whichever is highest. EG: Derek has 2 base actions and can hold up to a maximum of 5. Sara has 3 actions and can hold up to a maximum of 6.
- **Official Rules Change:** If you have extra actions you may spend them to increase your chance to hit by +10% per extra action.

This rules change will be incorporated into Blood!: Hell on Earth and Blood!: Star Shock, when these eventually come out.



# Ourobowrong

An ancient symbol, the Ourobowrong is meant as a warning and a curse to those who are too enamoured of their own Machiavellian schemes. It is a sage reminder that the more complex the plot, the more people that are involved, the less likely it is to remain secret and the less likely it is to succeed.

Out-of-game the Ourobowrong is the identifying symbol of The Shadow World line, a rallying flag for those who like the line of games and a way of identifying fan material that you write for it. All of which, however contradictory, overpowered or stupid is official so long as the author sends us a copy and includes this symbol on their work.

In game the Ourobowrong is a symbol of the mysterious 'Old Boys Network', the secret masters of the Shadow World who manipulate all the vaguely-supernatural races from behind the scenes using the power of the Metagame and the abuse of their temporal and transtemporal power. Some of their secret knowledge has spread to others though, resulting in the widespread use of the following ritual by Crowleys, Chemistz and Wizkids.

## Curse of the Ourobowrong

Over the course of half an hour the caster knots, unties and re-knots a piece of string until it begins to fall apart at which point he intones:

*"Are you a piece of string?"*

To which an assistant should answer:

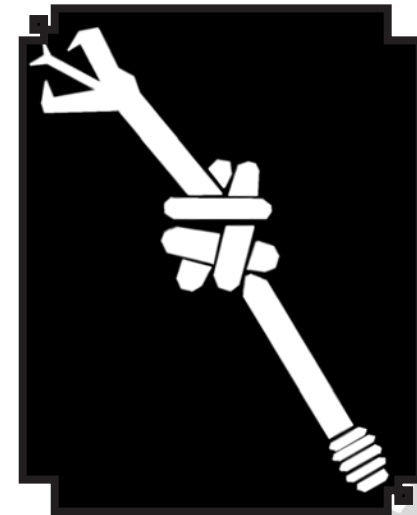
*"No, I'm a frayed knot."*

The curse affects a single target and lasts for a whole 48 hours, enough to ruin a weekend. During this period anyone attempting to assist the target or to do something on their behalf has their DC raised by 5 (or increases the difficulty for the person that they're assisting by 1 per helper\* or increases the difficulty by 1\*\*

The GM should keep these modifiers secret so that the players don't cheat like the conniving bastards they all are.

*\*OGL version.*

*\*\* Xpress version.*



# '45: The Pukes of Dannger

Deep in the south lies Dannger County, a tucked away, rural area that was spared the worst of the war, but not the worst of the fallout. The town of Dannger City is constantly on a knife-edge of survival, caught between being too small to survive and not being large enough to attract any attention from anyone powerful enough to harm them.

They're also protected by their ruthless 'hanging judge', Judge Hoss Gourmand. The Gourmand family are credited – largely self-credited – with being the saviours of Dannger County and the city. Judge Gourmand's rough justice is another reason that few people bother the county. Backed by his sheriff and deputies Judge Gourmand runs a tight ship and claims ownership of just about everything within the county's borders, standing for no guff.

There's a problem though, one clan of swamp-billies is holding out against Gourmand's attempts to bring justice and civilisation to the county. Mutated, rebellious and determined to spread their corruption to others, the Puke family runs radioactive moonshine to the outlying farms and even into Dannger City itself. One by one people are succumbing to strange mutations and disappearing into the swamps and there's nothing Doc Petticoat – the town's ageing doctor – can do about it.

There's little Judge Gourmand and his law officers can do to stop the Pukes, thanks to their souped up muscle car, the Beauregard, about the only fast car in the whole county.

Desperate to bring the Puke clan under control, Judge Gourmand sets out to hire people from outside to deal with the Pukes once and for all. That's where the players come in...

## Dannger County

Dannger Country consists of Dannger City, outlying farms and a good deal of swamp. It's criss-crossed with trails and dirt roads that pick their way alongside the rivers and through the swamps. None of them are great surfaces to drive on and there's so many dead ends and blind turns that the whole thing is incredibly dangerous to anyone who doesn't know the area. In the summer Dannger Country is a sweltering, fly-blown and stinking place and it's not much better the rest of the year.



## Dannger City

Dannger City is the only town in the whole county and it's not much of a city. It has a few houses, a bar – The Gator – which belongs to the Judge, the Hotel Dannger, the doctor's office and Pooter's Garage.

### The Gator:

The Gator is a big wooden building, it's ceiling lined with rotating fans (the generator runs off swamp gas). It serves local food but – alas – no drink. There isn't much that's suitable for making into booze in the swamps. Indeed it's something of a mystery what the Pukes use to make their 'shine. You can get food and entertainment here, not least of all the lovely presence of Rose Puke, a pretty swamp flower who was rescued from her cousins in the clan Puke by the Judge and his law officers, about the only victory that they've ever had over the Puke clan the whole time they've been duking it out.

### Hotel Dannger:

Judge Gourmand lives here with his impressively fat wife Lola, who runs the hotel. It's clean and relatively dry and that's about all that can really be said about it. It's horribly overpriced for what it is – at least if you're an outsider – but Lola is a fierce and intimidating woman and won't stand for any guff, least of all from her husband. She's the only person in the whole area aside from the Pukes who stands up to him.

### Doc's Office:

Doc Petticoat is ancient and wrinkled old near-corpse. He has forgotten more about medicine than most people have ever known. Unfortunately he's also forgotten most of what he's known. Any talent he still has for medicine may have more to do with an intimate, personal knowledge of death than any medical skill. He only has the most basic of medical equipment and yet he's still the best doctor (the only doctor) for some considerable distance.

### **Pooter's Garage:**

A graveyard of scrap metal, Pooter does his best to cobble together and keep running the few vehicles the town has going for it. The Judge suspects that Pooter is helping the Pukes keep their own car running, but he's not been able to prove it as of yet and Pooter is far too valuable to the town to lock up or accuse without cause.

### **The Puke 'Stead:**

The Puke Homestead is a terrifying old farm out in the swamps, lurking atop a big pile of earth and slowly but inevitably sinking into the swamp bit by bit. The Pukes don't spend much time there any more, it's really just a rotting heap though it still contains many stuffed and mounted animals in its cobwebbed depths and the Pukes still congregate here as a clan on notable occasions.

### **The Swamp:**

The swamp is a tangled mess of twisted and mutated trees, sucking mud, alligators, snakes and giant, mutated catfish. It's also home to the Puke clan – scattered in various hovels where they run their stills – and the mysterious source of their power as well as the fruit that they use to make their 'shine.

### **Hovels and Stills:**

The Puke clan hovels are all close to the raised dirt tracks that criss-cross the swamp but are little more than shacks with fold down beds and a pot to piss in. The stills are primitive affairs, distilling mashed up and fermented foul-smelling fruit into a clear, powerful, slightly glowing liquor that can be very flammable and explosive.

### **Mother Hydra:**

Deep in the Puke-owned swamps is a grove of seven twisted trees, hung with heavy, misshapen fruit that smells faintly of fish. This is the source of the Puke clan moonshine and the mutation effects of the drink that introduces strange, fish-like traits to those who imbibe it over time. Some members of the Puke clan who've been drinking it for some time have completely transformed into 'Creatures from Lagoons' (P85 of the '45 rulebook) and rest here, protecting the mother trees.

### **Townfolk**

#### **Judge Gourmand:**

Fat, arrogant, disgusting, murderous, lecherous. Gourmand is, nonetheless, the unbending master of Dannger County and the only one standing between the county and chaos. Shame he's such a disgusting, horrible, bastard.

Strength 2, Resilience 3, Dexterity 3, Speed 2, Intelligence 4, Perception 4, Charm 3, Control 3, Resolve 5, Resistance 5  
Argument/Legal/Prosecution 4, Intimidation/Bossy 3, Business 3, Firearms 2, Drive 2  
Lecherous -1 on social rolls/resistances versus women (3 points)  
Greedy – Always takes more than his fair share (2 points)  
Nasty Reputation +1 bonus to intimidation and courtroom Law checks. (2 points).  
Hog-leg – Sawn off shotgun, white-painted jeep.

### **Sherrif Haslok Poutane:**

Incompetent and goofy the only reason he's sherrif at all is that Gourmand knows he can be easily dominated and made to do what he wants. Haslok has an unreasonable love for his mutated basset hound, Swift.

Strength 3, Resilience 4, Dexterity 3, Speed 3, Intelligence 3, Perception 3, Charm 4, Control 2, Resolve 3, Resistance 3  
Drive/Police Cruiser 3, Firearms/Pistol 3, Animal Handling/Dog/Swift 3, Alertness 2, Tracking 1, Melee 2  
Animal Companion – Swift the Bassett hound (8 points)  
Lucky Escape – Can completely negate all damage from a car crash once per game (3 points).  
Battered old police cruiser, mutant basset hound, .38 revolver, 12 gauge pump action shotgun, billy club.





**Swift the Bassett hound:**

A mutated dog, trained by the military to wear a explosive harness and run at tanks, Swift turned out to mutate, during the short war and has somehow managed to survive many attempts to destroy tanks, tractors and several cars. Perhaps swift is immortal?

Strength 2, Resilience 3, Dexterity 1, Speed 2, Intelligence 1, Perception 4, Charm 4, Control 3, Resolve 2, Resistance 2  
Tracking/Scent 5, Looking sad and adorable 4, Running Under vehicles 3, Biting 1  
Mutant Immortality – Swift regenerates one column of damage every turn, even if killed or reduced below what the wound table would allow. (12 points). Swift can only be destroyed by fire.  
Collar, Weird little antennae sticking out his head.

**Deputies Rufus Gourmand & Enis Bent:**

Interchangeable, amiable dumb-dumbs whose defining characteristic is that they're dumb enough to be ordered around by Poutane.

Strength 3, Resilience 3, Dexterity 3, Speed 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Charm 3, Control 3, Resolve 2 Resistance 2  
Drive 3, Tracking 2, Firearms 2, Alertness 2, Melee 2  
Too dumb – Rufus and Enis are gullible but any direct mental attacks or attempts to confuse them suffer from the fact they find anything but blindly following orders to be too mentally demanding. They gain a +1 bonus to all resistance checks, because they're too dumb. (2 points). 38 revolver, pump action shotgun, billyclub.

**Crazy Pooter:**

A slowly mutating, secret alcoholic, Pooter is utterly in the pocket of the Puke clan. He's a good engineer but he's just not on-side with the town or the judge.

Strength 3, Resilience 4, Dexterity 4, Speed 3, Intelligence 2, Perception 2, Charm 2, Control 2, Resolve 2, Resistance 2  
Engineer/Automotive/Jury Rig 4, Brawling 3, Melee/Wrench 2  
Gills – Pooter is beginning to mutate and, as a consequence, can breathe underwater (4 points).  
Big wrench, toolbox, radioactive moonshine in a thermos.

**Lola Gourmand:**

A heaving mass of pale flesh and terrifying, indomitable will, Lola is a woman you do not want to cross. Through sheer power of intimidation and hard stares she can cause as much damage as a man with a shotgun.

Strength 3, Resilience 4, Dexterity 1, Speed 1, Intelligence 4, Perception 4, Charm 3, Control 4, Resolve 5, Resistance 5  
Intimidate/Men 5, Cooking/Southern style 3, Business/hotelier 3, Brawl 2, Melee/Frying pan 3  
Armour of corpulence - Lola reduces all incoming harm by 1, due to her blubber. (3 points).  
Natural authority – Lola gets a +1 bonus whenever she's ordering or bossing anyone around. (3 points).  
Rolling pin, Frying pan, Fan.

**Doc Petticoat:**

A dried-up, ancient, mumbling, living corpse getting the Doc's help with your injuries may be more harmful than not bothering at all.

Strength 1, Resilience 1, Dexterity 2, Speed 1, Intelligence 2, Perception 1, Charm 4, Control 4, Resolve 4, Resistance 4. Medicine/quackery 1, Bullshit/medical 4, Elicit Sympathy 5. Senior Moments – the Doc constantly forgets things, up to 3 things each session when it would be most annoying for the players (3 points). Doctor's bag, seersucker suit.

**Rose Puke:**

A gorgeous woman, Rose is the only member of the Puke clan that's liked around Dannger City. She was rescued from the Puke clan and brought into the town, taken under the Judge's wing and given a job at The Gator. She has a sunny and bright disposition and everyone loves her to bits. Little do they know that blood is thicker than water and that she allowed herself to be 'rescued', just so that the Pukes would have an extra person in town to look out for their interests.

Strength 3, Resilience 3, Dexterity 4, Speed 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Charm 5, Control 3, Resolve 3, Resistance 3  
Seduction/Flirtation/Elicit Favour 4, Waitressing/Get Tips 3, Survival/Swamp 4, Lie 3  
Drop Dead Gorgeous: +3 to any manipulation of menfolk (9 points).  
Gills: Rose is partially mutated and, as such, can breathe underwater (4 points).  
Tiny, tiny, denim shorts and a halter top.



## The Puke Clan

### Aunty Bessie Puke:

A big, beefy woman, Bessie is the matriarch of the whole Puke clan. Clad in denim overalls she circuits the Puke family stills ensuring that they're producing a good product that carries the taint that will mutate others in the same way as the Puke clan has been, spreading their mutant taint in service of the mysterious trees in the hidden grove.

Strength 4, Resilience 4, Dexterity 2, Speed 2, Intelligence 4, Perception 3, Charm 3, Control 4, Resolve 4, Resistance 3

Brewing/Distilling/Moonshine 5, Survival/Swamp 5, Brawling 2, Melee 3, Firearms/shotgun 3

Gills: Bessie is partially mutated and, as such, can breathe underwater (4 points).

Mental Control of the Clan: Bessie can telepathically give commands to the fully transformed Pukes (4 points).

Double barrelled shotgun, old truck.

### Lo Puke:

Blonde, muscular and charming. Lo Puke is the salesman of the Puke clan, roaring around in the Beauregard and convincing people – who are already desperate for a drink – to buy their 'shine.

Strength 3, Resilience 4, Dexterity 3, Speed 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 4, Charm 4, Control 3, Resolve 3, Resistance 3

Drive/Muscle Car/The Beauregard 4, Brawl 3, Archery 3, Melee 3, Survival/Swamp 4, Dodge 3, Tracking 3

Gills: Lo is partially mutated and, as such, can breathe underwater (4 points).

Compound bow, arrows, knife, dynamite.

### Booker Puke:

Dark haired and dangerous, Booker Puke is the muscle of the Puke clan, a bareknuckle boxer who intimidates into compliance those who Lo cannot charm.

Strength 4, Resilience 4, Dexterity 4, Speed 4, Intelligence 3, Perception 3, Charm 3, Control 3, Resolve 3, Resistance 3

Drive/Muscle Car/The Beauregard 5, Brawl 4, Archery 2, Melee 3, Survival/Swamp 3, Dodge 3, Tracking 2

Gills: Booker is partially mutated and, as such, can breathe underwater (4 points).

Compound bow, arrows, knife, dynamite.

### The Puke Clan:

Mutated into rampaging swamp beasts the majority of the clan hides in the swamps

## The Beauregard:

A souped up muscle car resembling an Oldsmobile Jetstar 88, the Beauregard is painted grey and has the racing number '00' painted on the side.

Sports Car: Health 13, Armour 3, +2 Speed/Acceleration +1 Handling

Armoured

Blower

Heavy Chassis: +1 health box per row.

Oversized Engine (2 seats only)

Smuggling compartment

Turbocharged

Wheel Blades 9 damage.



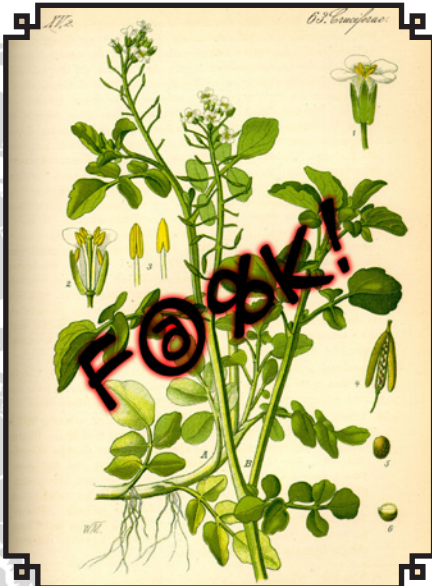
# Beta Planet

## Watercrass

Found growing wild throughout the south of what was once the British Isles and where it was once cultivated in its pre 'oops' form, watercrass is particularly found in Harshire along the contaminated waterways and rivulets of that (glowing) green and pleasant land. Watercrass is noted for its spicy flavour, it's lush, tangled leaves and its strange mutated defence of saying the most foul, disgusting and inappropriate things to anyone who treads on it or tries to pick it.

**Watercrass:** (Difficult, lightly obscured, improper) The tangled leaves of watercrass provide good cover, though they hinder movement. The constantly whispered innuendos, insults and aspersions to perversity muttered by the crass impose a -2 penalty to any actions while occupying the same space as the crass. Weaker minds may snap under the unrelenting assault to their psyche.

Other forms of more aggressive crass, such as the toxic-gas producing Mustard Crass are also known.



## Dollies

Level 2 Brute  
Large Mutant Animal (sheep)

**XP:** 125  
**HP:** 46; **Bloodied:** 23  
**Initiative:** +1  
**AC:** 16, **Fortitude:** 15, **Reflex:** 12, **Will:** 15  
**Perception:** +8, Dollies can only be flanked from the rear, not from the side.  
**Speed:** 8

### Traits

**Mob Defence:** +1 bonus to AC per Dolly adjacent to it. (Max +8).

### Standard Attacks

**Kick:** (physical, at will): Attack, melee (one creature) +5 Vs AC. Hit: 1d6+3 damage.

**Trample:** (physical, recharge 6): Attack, melee (all creatures in range) +5 Vs AC. The dolly charges its full movement and attacks anyone and anything that it overlaps during that move. Hit: 2d10+3.

### Skills

Perception +8  
Str: 14 (+3), Dex: 10 (+1), Wis: 16 (+4), Con: 16 (+4),  
Int: 2 (-3), Cha: 10 (+1)

Before everything went pear-shaped there were many attempts to produce genetically engineered animals and plants to deal with the food problems across the world. While most of these were concentrated upon vegetable engineering, cloning and other manipulations were done upon farm animals. The idea was that the 'perfect' farm specimen could be engineered, then cloned so that every animal in a herd could be perfect.

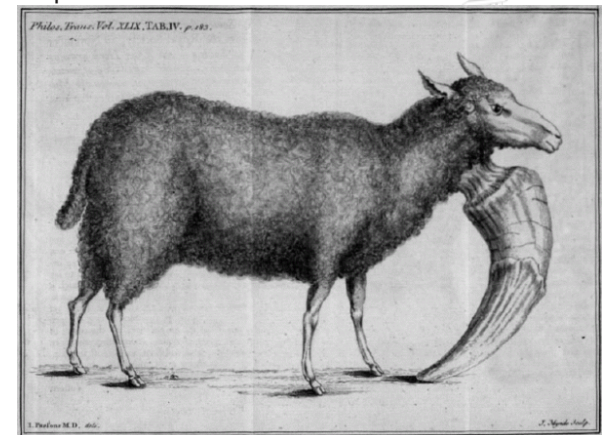
Goats and sheep can make use of land that isn't arable for crops and as a result were the target for most of these manipulations which, in one dimension or other at least, topped out with the 'Dolly'.

A genetically engineered, giant, parthenogenetic sheep that not only produces delicious meat and milk, but which exudes metals that it eats into its wool, cleaning areas of toxic metals and simultaneously producing a really tough fleece.

Every year, reliably, in lambing season, dollies give birth to an exact genetic copy of themselves, or, at least, that's the plan. This means you can start even with a herd of one and year on year, provided none die, you'll double what you have. Unfortunately, the nature of the world being what it is, mutations do creep in and are replicated in the various different lines from different clone mothers, resulting in many different sub-species of dolly from the Venomous Vampire Sheep of the rocky wilds of Tornaway to the giant-horned monsters of Ramsgait. Many species, including the baseline, are also used as mounts.

(Subspecies should substitute their trample ability with something else).

The tough wool produced by dollies can be knitted into armour, providing +2 protection and many farming communities rely on this, even though the armour is often laced with radioactive isotopes and heavy metals. Some dollies are even, deliberately, grazed upon particularly mutagenic land to produce special wool or to try and create new, useful, mutant lines from the base species.



# Face 'Hugging' Mecha Gibbons

*From a flippant comment by Ian Belcher*

Doctor Kama'Lu's island exists across multiple dimensions and, wherever he finds himself, he unleashes his ape-based creations from Ro-Daddio to, unfortunately, the Face-'Hugging' Mecha Gibbons. Cobbled together from decommissioned love-bots these tree-swinging sentinels were originally designed for rapid movement and patrol of the jungles of Doctor Kama'Lu's tree-covered home but, unfortunately, their old instincts still hold true, humiliatingly enough for their victims.

## Face-Hugging Mecha Gibbon

Level 5 Skirmisher

Small Arborial Animate (robot)

XP 200

**HP:** 64, **Bloodied:** 32

**Initiative:** +7

**Perception:** +8 (Darkvision)

**AC:** 21, **Fortitude:** 17, **Reflex:** 18, **Will:** 16

**Speed:** 3, **Swing:** 12 (Trees, skeletal buildings or other frameworks allow the mecha gibbon to move at speed)

**Immune:** Poison; **Resist:** 10 electricity, Radiation

### Standard Actions

#### Swing-By Smack (Physical) – At Will

Hurling past on one arm the mechanical ape extends one massive metallic fist and smashes into you on its way past.

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature) +8 vs. AC.

Hit: 2d6+7 physical damage during a swinging move, using both move and standard actions, the attack may not take place on the first or last square of movement. AC is reduced by -2 until the mecha gibbon's next turn.

#### Ape-Arm Beatdown (Physical) – At Will

With a hooting cry the mecha gibbon descends at speed, smashing down with both of its big metal fists.

Attack Melee 1 (one creature) +8 vs AC

Hit: 1d8+7 physical damage.

### Triggered Actions

#### Face-'Hug' – At Will

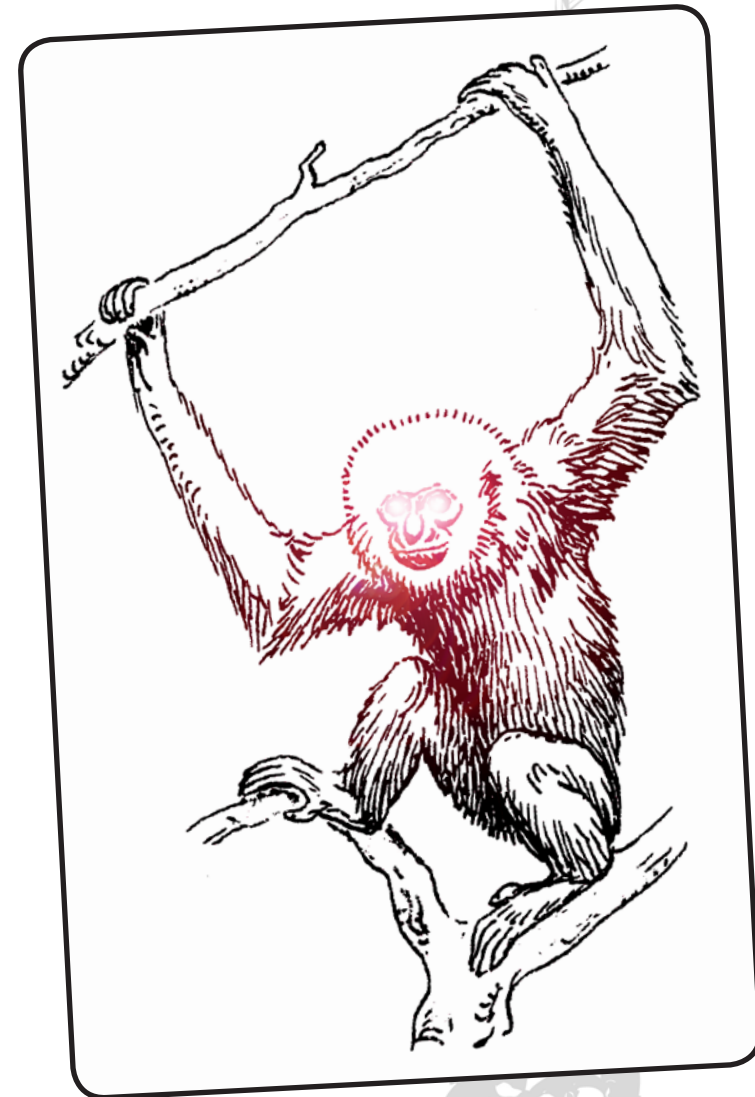
The damage it has taken has booted up some of its... old programming. A vibrating proboscis appears from the mecha-gibbon's crotch plate and looms large in your view as it swings towards you with a lustful gleam in its glowing red eyes.

Trigger: When bloodied the mecha gibbon gains access to this attack.

Attack: Melee 1 (one creature) +6 vs Fortitude, +2 bonus to further attacks of the same kind following the first successful attack.

Hit: 1d6+6 damage and target is Restrained.

STR: 20 +7, Dex 16+5, Wis: 12 (+3), Con: 16 (+5), Int: 6 (+0), Cha: 7 (+0)



## Invaderz: Liberty, Equality, Revenge

So far as any Jerkians know there are no females of their species. This is all a lie. There *are* female Jerkians but they are relatively small in number and segregated away from the main bulk of the Jerkian people. Now, however, something has gone wrong. One of the ships from the home fleet crash landed on the planet and the female Jerkians (Jerkettes?) received a rude education in how things 'really are' in the rest of the Empire and some of them have, perhaps understandably, become 'quite upset'.

Fleeing to Earth this squad of Jerkettes have decided to get their revenge upon an uncaring patriarchal universe by sabotaging Jerkian operations in this system. They have a small shuttlecraft, standard trooper equipment and some experimental equipment that they can put to use, not that they really know what they're doing, but then nor do regular Jerkians.

### Female Jerkians

Meat: 2

Brain Meat: 3

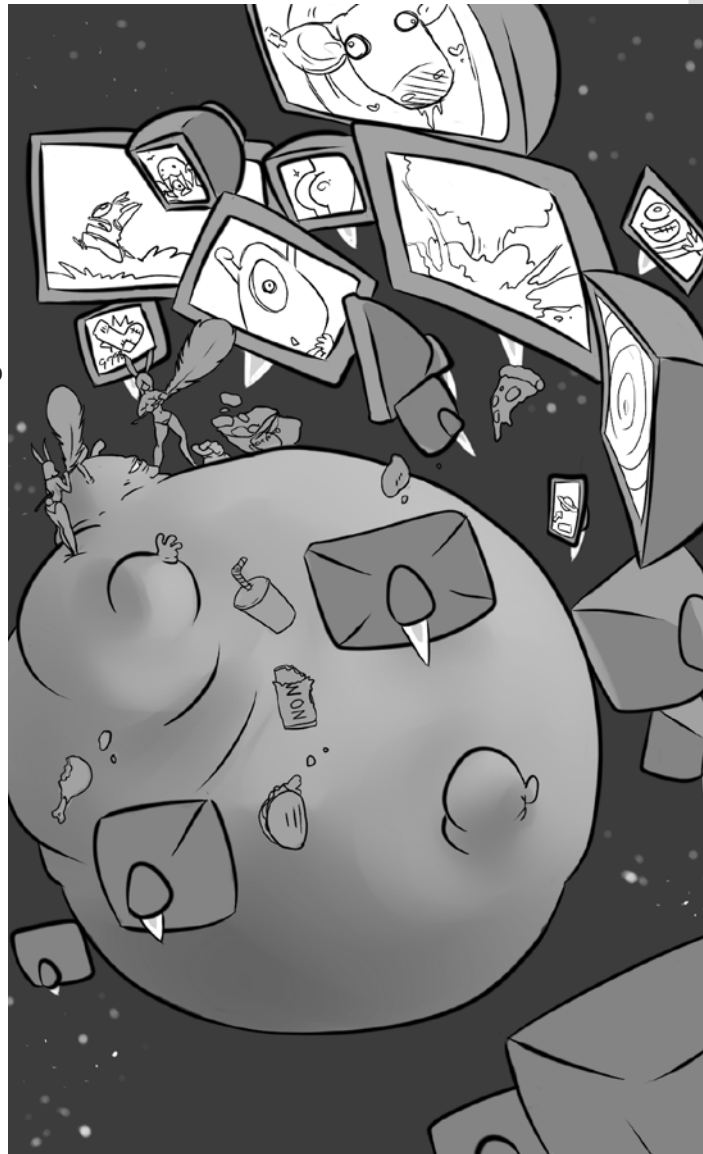
Expertise: 2

Luck: 4

#### Skill

Female Jerkians are good at 'Girl stuff' and have one other skill.

Girl Stuff can be interpreted as loosely as you like, essentially it's anything a player or a Games Master can make a decent argument for.



## The Adventure

You can play this game in two ways, as the female Jerkians trying to take their revenge or as the male Jerkians trying to execute their mission while being sabotaged and accused of 'Phallogentric oppression of half of the Jerkian race'. Which does tend to complicate matters.

The ideal mission to be interrupted should be something that divides along a natural fault line of male/female. Perhaps the Emperor has the male Jerkians kidnapping human lingerie models for his harem moon, perhaps he's taken a particular fancy to a human porn star and one side tries to protect her while the other side tries to get to her.

The Jerkian Emperor is a cad, a bounder and a sleaze so just about anything is possible. It's also worth remembering that male Jerkians have never seen a Jerkian female before and the effect upon them may be profound. Female Jerkians have only ever seen the Emperor before but, having experience with at least one male, the effect upon them is likely to be less profound.

If the Emperor becomes aware of the escapees he will term them 'mutants' and demand that they be terminated with extreme prejudice, something that may be difficult if the male Jerkians have, inevitably, fallen in love/lust with their saboteurs.

## Invaderz: Moon Landing

The filthy humans – so primitive that they still set off explosives under themselves to get into space – have been talking about returning to their inferior, singular moon for some time. Until now the Jerkian Empire has been sure that they would never bother given the sickening uselessness of their technology and their peculiarly insular political system, dictatorship by the Emperor is *far* more effective.

Now, however, something has changed, perhaps due to repeated Jerkian interference on Earth. The problem is that one of the imperial fleets is stationed on and behind the moon and while it would be easy to simply destroy the Earthian expedition, that would tip the Jerkian hand and make things more difficult than they would need to be.

Fleet Commander of intelligence, Xoz, has detailed the team to deal with the problem, not by destroying the humans but by ensuring that the mission – once it lands – is plagued with problems and distracted from noticing the flying saucer, rubbish heaps, graffiti, footprints and other evidence of alien presence.

Astronauts have the same statistics and skill sets as soldiers, but are also Good At Space Stuff.

To complete the mission the Jerkians must be stealthy and go undetected. Since this is unlikely to happen the natural fall back is to destroy them all. Accomplishing this goal *without* destroying the humans – or appearing on TV - is the challenge...

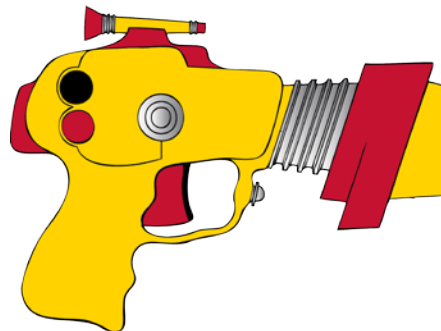
## Invaderz: Probing

Star Captain Zog has a special, personal mission for the team that he would consider a great favour. As captain of a science vessel Zog has been involved in capturing and experimenting upon insignificant human filth for some years. After the last series of probulations Zog found that his platinum chronometer, presented to him by the Emperor himself for his work during the Zorgian uprising, was missing. Having searched the ship thoroughly Zog is convinced that he lost his chronometer while probulating humans from the remote Alaskan town of Moosarkana.

The team is charged with recovering this lost timepiece but the problem is that Zog was extremely diligent and zealous in his probulations and there's a huge number of potential victims that could have the timepiece lodged inside them – if they even still have it still inside them at this point. To further complicate matters the excessive probulation has been actually noticed by the powers that be, as well as amateur psychologists into hypnotism and Moosarkana is subject to an MIB investigation, further complicating matters for our intrepid Jerkian warriors.

This will end badly, likely for various people's definitions of 'end'.

The characters must locate the human with the chronometer inside them, extract them from the town and remove the chronometer safely (EG: Not by disintegrating the human) to complete the mission effectively.



## Invaderz: Lamethrower

A new experimental device, ready for use on the Earthian front, the Lamethrower is a combination of Jerkian military engineering and Gellarite alternative science.

When the device is activated it flings out a field that collapses quantum wavefronts, colliding universes until it finds the absolute worst incarnation of anything it is aimed at. A tank hit by this field may collapse into rust or turn into a number of ex-soviet tractors. A human soldier may transform from being a member of the elite special forces to an indolent, fat, unemployed peon without any of his weaponry or equipment.

The Lamethrower is powered by twin Chopra D-Packs giving it more than enough energy endurance to last a complete mission. The only problem comes with the fact that the field baffles degrade very quickly and this can result in a massive blow-back of quantum energy that can affect the wielder.

When the Lamethrower works all the target's statistics are reduced to 1 and it is no longer Good or Very good at anything. If the Lamethrower goes wrong it backfires reducing the user's statistics in the same way and then breaking.

Lamethrowers can have their polarity reversed by an engineer with enough gubbins, turning it into a Leet-Ray. The Leet-Ray raises all statistics to 5 (if lower) and makes the target Very Good at every skill they have. If the Leet-Ray goes wrong it explodes, killing the user and hitting everyone in 100 feet with the normal effects of the Lamethrower.

## Cantrip Comprehensive

I had the idea for a different magical-school pisstake game some time ago. Originally – as conceived – Wizkid wasn't so much like this but as Ian began to develop it it became obvious that there was a rich vein of humour and satire to tap into there. Of course, we went with the private school theme and the existence of Wizkid now means there's no real 'room' in our line up to do Cantrip Comprehensive but I may recycle some of the ideas from it into Wizkid-related blog posts or a Wizkid supplement – which will be the first time I've gone back to the Shadow World personally since Bloodsucker: The Angst.

Xpress is a very flexible system and Wizkid has a relatively freeform magic system which could be turned to good use in '45 and some other – less serious – implementations of the system. If you wanted to take it more seriously you could easily use Wizkid to run more kosher and canonical 'fan games' of a certain series of popular books by a litigious author.

I think Ian's writing and design skills have come on leaps and bounds, the whole Xpress reboot is a big improvement over the d20 version, it's been interesting to see someone else's approach to the game world as I've given over the line to Ian. He's tended to step things up to a bigger scale than they started but Wizkid represents a return to form, back to the Bloodsucker level of wannabes.

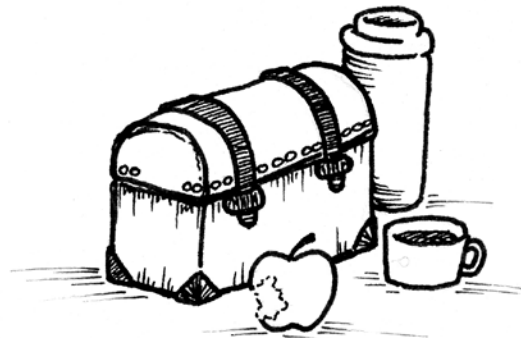
I'm pretty much decided I'll write up Cantrip Comprehensive as blog posts, so you'll see some support for the game up on the website over time, those blogs will be polished, expanded and published here until they're complete, when they'll be collected, edited and published.

## Magic(k)al Comprehensives

There have been several instances during which the existing structure of ancient, privately owned and run magic(k)al schools hasn't been able to cope with the influx. Never have things been so bad as they have been since the late 1990s, since when there has been an ongoing 'perfect storm' of occult interest amongst tweens and teenagers that has resulted in far too many of them stumbling into the true magic(k)al arts.

Not all of these kids have the money or the magical heritage to justify their attendance in the best schools such as the Wobbly Academy, Orcsford, Wheaton or the others. It became necessary, given the massive influx, to go to the government for help. The same government that has previously caused problems for the magical fraternity. Since one hand doesn't seem to know what the other is doing they help – sort of – at the same time as they're causing problems, after all, it's better to have all these magic(k)al problem-causers a) owing you and b) all collected in one place.

With government funding a series of buildings were re-purposed to become the new magic(k)al comprehensives, a series of substandard, underfunded, shoddy buildings where anyone who has shown a passing capability for magic(k) is rounded up and flung in order to be taught by all the magicians, wizards, soothsayers, warlocks and witches who couldn't pass muster to educate at one of the older academies.



Needless to say this results in a rather brutish school environment in which learning is not a priority, where black magic(k) is traded around the playground like pokemon cards and where nobody really wants to be; not the teachers and least of all the kids. All this amateurish magic(k) flying about the place is dangerous, tears holes in reality and makes the comprehensives magic(k)ally as well as physically dangerous. If you're not breathing in asbestos or clinging in vain hope to a Victorian radiator for a modicum of heat you're getting your head dunked into a toilet by a half-orc or falling into a dungeon pocket-realm that's spontaneously appeared under the boiler room. That's if the teachers – who haven't been properly cleared due to the haste and desperation with which they've been hired – don't get you. Then there's the exchange students who are termed 'extra-strange' students with good reason.

The ivy-clad private magic(k)al schools get all the kudos, but there's something to be said for the school of hard knocks and it's a more useful life skill to deal with that sort of real world situation rather than the self-important bullshit that goes on elsewhere. Cantrip Comprehensive is one such of these schools.

## Cantrip Comprehensive

Cantrip Comprehensive is situated in the small town of Blackchurch in Wiltshire, England. Blackchurch is an almost entirely unremarkable town noted only for a brief zombie infestation and the fact that the local populace seem to consume more drugs than the population of a much larger town, perhaps a side effect of the presence of the school, or at least an excuse for public 'incidents'.

The school was originally built to cope with an influx of magic(k)ally interested children in the mid 1960s. It was built to replace an old TB hospital that was present on the site before and has lead to the presence of a couple of coughing ghosts that make assemblies a noisy event and one that's often even less interesting than such formalities normally are.

The school is divided into four 'blocks' which surround a 'lovely' expanse of asphalt which passes for a recreation ground. A rather sad patch of grass is at the back of the school is where Bigpitch and other sports are played, half the size it used to be since part of the playing fields were sold off for a new housing estate, Catweasel Place, to be built.

**1. The Old Block** – Once the site of the TB hospital this red-brick victorian building is hot in the summer and cold in the winter, creaking, draughty and – frankly – in need of pulling down. Magic(k) and history is in its every brick which is part of the reason they don't *dare* tear it down.

**2. The New Block** – Not so new really since it's a concrete and sheet-metal, brutalist monstrosity from the early 1970s. It's grubby, smells faintly of plastic, has a depressing atmosphere and houses most of the alchemical and other more technical classes, which means it has burnt out a few times, though never been destroyed. Each time it is redecorated as cheaply as possible and somehow 'flame retardant' is never on the list of priorities.

**3. The Community Block** – This is where the indoor sports 'arena' is, along with the 'community area' which is used for fund-raising events and as a clubhouse for the sixth form.

**4. The Huts** – 'Temporary' buildings that have been there as long as anyone remembers, they're even worse than the Old Block, even though they're much newer. They're due to be replaced 'any day now'.

The whole area is protected from prying, mortal eyes by a massive Nerf spell that bolloxes up the eyesight of anyone looking towards the school so that they only see normal goings on. A variety of pocket realms serve as special classrooms and as the staffroom, away from troublesome and interfering students.

The Comprehensive is what passes for a community school in the magic(k)al subculture of the Shadow World and as such takes the magically talented of all degrees of talent and all social strata through its gates. This acclimates the kids to real life experience by making sure that they're victimised and bullied from the moment they arrive and it also tends to lead to world-weary teachers who wish they had proper jobs somewhere else, anywhere but here.

The Comprehensive teaches a broad curriculum, covering basic conventional subjects as well as magic(k)al concepts. The staff include teachers of all grades of ability and enthusiasm – or lack thereof. The school might be cheap, but some people still have ideological reasons for teaching in a State magic(k)al school, or simply aren't welcome in the private ones.

#### **Headmaster: Mr Punch**

Mr Punch is not actually a Wizard. Ever since wizarding school, which – he has no idea why he was sent to – he has faked it and the whole thing has sort of gotten out of hand. Now he finds himself in charge of a full comprehensive magical school. His way of dealing with this is to hide in his office and not come out unless he really has to. Most years he gets away with this, only venturing forth when new kids are taken in in September to give a mumbled speech and then fleeing back to his office. Mr Punch is a big, broad shoulders and barrel-bellied man in his mid fifties with a penchant for tweed suits and spectacles on chains, though he still somehow manages to lose track of them. He is a bumbling idiot and knows he is, so staying out of the way is probably his best plan.

#### **Assistant Head: Miss Encephala**

Grey skinned, Miss Encephala has an octopus for a head and speaks in pinched, hissing tones. She has an unnerving habit of stroking pupil's heads with her gooey tentacles while she's talking to them. Her stare is unnerving and unblinking and she utterly, utterly, loathes children of all kinds. With Mr Punch hiding in her office she has to do his job as well as hers and this has made her even more psychotic. In acts of petty revenge she undermines the school by spending its money on pointless things, making it look nice trying to make money from it and not replacing books or magic(k)al equipment unless forced to.

#### **Head of Physical Education: Mister(?) Alex Silverbirch**

Of indeterminate gender this half-elven teacher acts slightly inappropriately with students of both sexes and his... her... its(?) gender is a topic of much speculation amongst the student body. Short haired, fine featured and dressed in a turquoise tracksuit, Silverbirch is in charge of the much hated PE department and has to cobble together a Bigpitch team. Cantrip Comprehensive always, always loses, but nobody in the school cares.

#### **Physical Education: Miss Krunk**

Half Troll and all woman, Miss Krunk lives a double life. At the school she's as butch and demanding as they come, forcing kids to go through their mandated physical education classes, the minimal exercise that a magician is required to do not to turn into a fat blob or to snap in a stiff wind. Out of school she likes pretty dresses, flowers and collects My Little Ponies, a dichotomy that pupils who encounter her outside of school can't get their heads around.



### **Caretaker: Mr Slaugh**

A creepy, shadowy figure, Mr Slaugh doesn't sleep and is always lurking, somewhere in the school, ready to mop the floors, clean the toilets, replace lightbulbs and anything else that needs to be done. Nobody ever sees him actually doing the work, but it seems to get done. When he's not working he's found in the boiler room which is hot, dark and spooky.

### **Nurse: Mrs Klump**

Mrs Klump is a construct, a stitched together mish-mash of pieces that don't really fit well together. Despite this she has a heart of gold (perhaps literally) and mothers any hurt kids almost unbearably until their parents come to get them. Oddly this tends to put kids off 'pulling a sickie' to get out of class as they can't bear to be treated like babies.

### **Office Staff: The Triplets**

Rather than maiden, mother, crone, The Triplets are reception, admin, secretarial. The same woman, divided into three, she styles her hair differently in each form to help people distinguish between them and uses small amounts of magic to make her job/s easier.

### **Head of English & Magical Languages: Madame Gorget**

A penanggal, Madame Gorget is attached to her body by a metal collar. As teacher of English and Magical Languages she is strict beyond belief and has no patience whatsoever for kids who do not share her talent for languages and dishes out far too many punishments and often calls kids stupid. That's a vampiric temperament for you.

### **English & Magical Languages: Mr Pott**

Mr Pott is half dwarf and all insane. While a brilliant and inspiring teacher with a real talent for languages he is an energetic, vibrating ball of energy that's barely contained at the best of times. He can be overwhelming in his sheer enthusiasm and loudness, something that doesn't endear him to other teachers who can't sustain that level of enthusiasm.

### **Head of Alchemy: Mr McBastard**

Another half-dwarf, Mr McBastard heads of the alchemy department the largest one, largely because it's the most commercial and thus gets most of the funding from Miss Encephala, much to the resentment of other departments. Mr McBastard doesn't give a flying fuck what anyone thinks, least of all his students upon whom he practices his drill sergeant routine on his deep, Scottish brogue.

### **Alchemy: Miss Neem**

Miss Neem is an intensely disinterested alchemy teacher who is really just phoning it in. Part basilisk she has to hide her death-ray gaze behind some big, bug-eyed sunglasses. You can still feel her glare though, whenever you disrupt the class, she just wants to get through it as fast as the kids do.

### **Alchemy: Mister Larry**

During a research trip to the Outer Hebrides, Mr Larry was bitten by the legendary Venomous Vampire Sheep of those island fields. He didn't turn fully, but did manage to limit the effect so that he only turns into a sheep during a full moon. Occasionally he 'slips' during the rest of the month, but he tries to keep it under wraps while working on side projects that interest him far more than teaching, desperate to get the respect he used to have as a field wizard.

### **Alchemy: Mr Noot**

An ill-advised government programme offers to let magicians who work in other fields of the magic(k)al underworld take up teaching without any training. Mr Noot is a typical product of this, a 'teacher' who has no idea what the hell he's doing and over whom the kids ride completely roughshod. He couldn't teach his way out of a wet paper bag and his classes are reminiscent of a school of piranhas devouring a confused – and possibly retarded – cow. He gets very red faced and smacks his lips when upset, which only makes it worse.

### **Head of Scribing & Enchantment: Mrs Bumble**

Mrs Bumble is a frustrated painter who would much rather live in the lake district painting watercolours but because of her lack of real talent and her magic(k)al capabilities finds herself teaching calligraphy, sculpting and enchantment to students who may even be better at it than she is. Out of bitter resentment she deeply criticises even the slightest flaw in any student's work and has, thus, put many possible great enchanters completely off the field forever.

### **Scribing & Enchantment: Rosebud**

A forest nymph, Miss Rosebud is a subject of some controversy amongst parents and staff – and the older pupils – split almost entirely along gender lines. A naked green girl with only three strategically placed leaves to cover her modesty, which causes awkward questions and problems. That said, she's one of the few good teachers who actually cares about her pupils and her bursting into tears is the ultimate disciplinary tool.

### **Head of Never Again: Mrs Popper**

The department of 'Never Again' is what passes for history and it's their responsibility to ensure that future generations do not make the huge magic(k)al mistakes of the past. Mrs Popper is enthusiastic in her task, especially when talking about the darker, nastier parts of history. Perpetually pregnant she has a love of silly voices, hats, props and illusory magic when she's teaching.

### **Never Again: Doctor Smee**

A creaking, dusty, slow-talking old fool Smee maintains his position through sheer stubbornness, despite having had a retirement party at least five times. They've now given up firing him and since he forgets to ask to be paid they let him hold his mumbled classes in the school library. Most kids don't even bother turning up.

### Head of Magical Theory: Mr Pond

Mr Pond is perpetually damp-looking, with a hideous comb-over. His clammy presence chills the room and while he's jovial and chummy and means nothing bad by it, it still manages to come across as creepy. He's very keen and competent when it comes to magical theory but is far more interested in being 'down with the kids'. Something that he's not nearly so good at.

### Magical Theory: Miss Turkey

Part harpy, Miss Turkey has an annoying, screeching voice and has to sit on a perch while teaching class. She's great at magical theory but her appearance and patchy feathers are unsettling, even disgusting and tend to put most of the kids off learning. She has a lot of sympathy for other half-breeds in the school system and runs a little support group at lunchtimes.

There are other teachers of course, filling in gaps and standing in when Mr Larry turns into a sheep, but these are the teachers who really shape the school experience for the pupils.



## Bad GM Tips

Having trouble getting players to listen to your descriptions? Pay R. Lee Ermey to shout them instead.

- *To increase randomisation 'train' your cat to chase dice.*
- *Don't play Conspiracy X, it's ALL TRUE!*
- *Create the RIFTS atmosphere by injecting your players with testosterone and LSD, then bashing their skull with hammer*
- *Help counter power-creep in your games by replacing experience points with head.*
- *Make your rolls better by clubbing a leprechaun to death with your dice bag*
- *If they give you lip, threaten to outsource your players to India.*
- *Tattoo important rules onto your body so you always have them to hand.*
- *Play Exalted with more than four players.*
- *Use your moobs to conceal dice rolls from your players.*
- *Save on game prep time by not learning the rules.*
- *Recreate a NASA feel for your SF game by filling your play room with 70s computers and giving everyone's money to a soldier.*

- *Form an all-star player group to show your group how it's done, GMS, Justin Achilli, Me, Ron Edwards and RPGPundit would be a good start.*
- *Increase game immersion by running LOTR entirely in Sindarin.*
- *Defeat Rules Lawyers by claiming The Terrorists Win if you uphold their complaint.*
- *Justify out of character shitty behaviour by NPCs with the phrase 'bitches be crazy, yo'.*
- *Get tips on suspension of disbelief from Col. Gadaffi.*
- *Don't feel like GMing? Summon the unquiet spirit of Gary Gygax, ask him about 4e and then have him run Tomb of Horrors.*
- *Get the best out of your game by threats to start a new one with blackjack and hookers.*
- *Show your players how it's done by introducing a GM PC to pick up the slack when they fail.*
- *Medical waste is a great source of game props.*
- *Increase player attendance by having their partner and children killed by the Serbian Mafia.*
- *Get your players emotionally invested in the game by sleeping with them.*
- *Want to get more girls to play in your*

*games? Rohypnol.*

- *Create a peasant look by eating 1lb of sugar pulling out three teeth and smoking this will also give you a medieval lifespan.*
- *Your descriptions aren't good enough to scare players in horror games? Keep Goatse flashcards to hand.*
- *Having attendance trouble at your sessions? Addict your players to crack. They'll come back!*
- *Create that all important Steampunk atmosphere by playing up a chimney and smacking any female player who opens their mouth.*
- *Beholder encounter? Shine a high-powered laser pointer at your player's eyes.*
- *Worried about cheating? Make everyone play naked and roll their dice for them.*
- *Give that session of Gamma World an authentic edge by feeding your players polonium in their pizza.*
- *Make that inn-based downtime a session to remember by dressing up a homeless man as a wizard and hiring prostitutes to be wenches.*
- *Add verisimilitude when the adventure in the sewers by shitting your pants during the game.*
- *Condition your munchkins to avoid combat by slapping them in the face every time they take damage.*

# Flenser Swarm: Pathfinder

A whirling mass of shards, sharp fragments of stone, obsidian or glass, motes of sand, howling from no mouth in anguish and pain. The only way it can ease its suffering is to inflict it upon others, in a thousand cuts

## Flenser Swarm

**CR:** 3

**XP:** 800

N Diminutive Outsider (Earth, Elemental, Swarm, Extraplanar)

Init:+1, Senses: Darkvision 60 ft, Perception: +2

### Defence

AC:19, Touch: 14, Flat Footed: 19 (+1 Size, +5 natural)

HP: 46 (7d10+7)

Fort:+6, Ref: +2, Will:+3

Defensive Abilities: swarm traits, immune – weapon damage, elemental traits.

Weakness: swarm traits

### Offence

Speed: 5 ft. Fly 40 ft. Good.

Melee: Swarm 2d6

Space: 10 ft, Reach 0 ft.

Special Attacks: Distraction, bleeding attack.

### Statistics

Str 1, Dex 10, Con 12, Int 4, Wis 12, Cha 9

Base Atk +5 CMB -, CMD -

Skills: Fly +11, Perception +2.

SQ: Swarm traits, elemental traits.

### Special Abilities

**Bleeding Attack:** Operates as though the target had been struck by a 'Bleeding critical' as per the Feat of the same name.

When an earth elemental is destroyed in the material realm its energy does not always return to the realm from which it came. The destroyed shards of the dead elemental can then, at some future time, re-animate with what remains of the elemental's energy, confused and broken, lashing out at anything vulnerable with the glass-sharp edges of its broken form.

This creature might be suitable for use in Obsidian Twilight, or any game that takes place in terrain dominated by the element of earth.