Dreams Can Come True

by Leath Sheales

Art by [andi jones](#)

This adventure for *In Nomine* is designed to allow the characters, especially followers of Blandine and Beleth, a chance to explore the ethereal realm a little more. The adventure takes place primarily on the ethereal plane, allowing the Dream walkers to be in their element.

Introduction

In the center of the Marches, standing on the invisible border that separates Blandine's realm of dream from Beleth's realm of nightmare, an ominous black hole has opened. This hole appeared two days ago and has not closed. It moves and shifts with the constant flux of the border, and has engulfed a few unwary Celestials as they ventured too close. The sudden and random changes in its movement have caused Celestials on both sides to keep their distance. Several unaware mortal dreamscapes have also been engulfed as they drifted into the hole. Celestials charged with protecting or menacing these dreamers have reported that the dreamers have entered comas from which they can not be wakened. Both Archangel and Demon Princess are calling for volunteers to enter the portal and discover what lies on the other side.

The Black Hole

The Black Hole dreamscape belongs to a young man named William "Billy" Jackson. Billy is a diagnosed sufferer of severe schizophrenia, and was recently involved in a car accident, sending him into a coma. While in his unconscious state, his dreamscape has remained open, bordering both nightmare and dream. Celestials of both sides may freely enter the dreamscape. Once inside, they ignore the normal limits for how long a celestial can remain in a dreamscape, as Billy's mental disorder and trauma prevent anyone from leaving, including Billy. The only way out is to convince Billy that this is all a dream, making him want to leave, therefore leaving the coma and closing the dreamscape. Rumors fueled by the unlucky people who have been trapped in this dreamscape say that another path exists.

In Billy's realm a Labyrinth exists which supposedly leads out, for those who can conquer it. Celestial powers that normally work within the Marches are still active, with a few exceptions: Kyriotates will find that once they enter Billy's dreamscape, any pieces of their being which are not in this particular dreamscape are instantly drawn back into the whole. They may use their resonance as usual inside the dreamscape, but may not communicate with those outside it with their multiplicity. Also, any Song or ability that allows communication or travel outside the dreamscape will not work. The person attempting to use the ability will simply feel the attempt fail, taking the Essence spent with it. For example, the Corporeal Song of Dreams will not allow the singer to depart the dreamscape, nor will the Song of Projection allow communication outside. The only exception to this automatic failing of communication is the Celestial Song of Tongues. Anyone attempting to bind a message into Essence may do so normally, however the

message will not leave Billy's dreamscape until he has wakened. The singer will not know this, of course. Also, no one from outside the dreamscape may communicate with those inside without actually entering Billy's dream.

Inside Billy's Head

The dreamscape is a perfect world, according to Billy's standards. Inside his head, Billy is the master of everything he can imagine, safe from all the worries of the real world. Billy has almost forgotten that another world exists outside his head, and is close to sealing the exit forever. The only things stopping him are these beings which have appeared recently in his world, apparently beyond his control. Time has become distorted inside this dreamscape, so every day that passes in the dreamscape is actually only an hour in the Marches. Those Celestials who possess time-based Dissonance conditions will find (if they ignore the conditions for long enough) that they need only fulfill the condition once every 24 dream-days. Also, Celestials will only regenerate Essence once every 24 dream-days, giving a clue to the distortion of time within Billy's dream.

Dreams Can Come True

The Dreamscape

The world as Billy has imagined it appears as a small city, full of people, all ready to do Billy's exact bidding. Within this world, Billy rules from the top of the highest building, which stands in the center of the city. He is a generous ruler, and will listen to everyone who appears before him. Billy feels much safer in this world than he did in the previous one (which is rapidly fading from his memory), and does not want to see this safety threatened. He is concerned about people appearing in his city whom he can not control (the Celestials).

The primary danger within Billy's dreamscape is becoming trapped. With each passing day, Billy becomes more and more content with his self-created world, and withdraws further into himself. This effect is contagious, and intruders from outside Billy's head find that with each passing day (as they occur in the Marches, 24 dream-days inside the dreamscape), they forget who they are and grow to accept Billy's world. For each day the characters spend in the dreamscape, they must make a Will roll minus the number of days they have been trapped. Success indicates that they know who they are. Failure indicates that they have forgotten, and take up a new life with all the comforts that Billy can provide. This effect vanishes in the Labyrinth, but once inside that, the person must escape or be trapped forever with their failures. The forgetfulness may be countered temporarily by use of the Ethereal Song of Healing (curing the "insanity") or the Celestial Song of Dreams, which allows the user to slightly alter the dream to eliminate the forgetfulness for a short time (this helps everyone trapped within the dreamscape for that day). Both of these Songs last one dream-day, ending as the sun rises on Billy's realm the next day.

The Labyrinth

If the player characters feel that they can not bring Billy from his dreamscape, they can always try to make it through the Labyrinth. There are one way entrances to this structure all over the city, but the largest and most well known sits at the foot of Billy's skyscraper. Once inside, there is only one way out, and people can not return to the city. Although the residents of the city call this place the Labyrinth, it does not resemble a maze at all. Characters braving the Labyrinth must face and conquer Billy's fears and past events, as the character is forced into Billy's role. Examples of

events in Billy's past include constant taunting by schoolyard bullies, and even a fear to cross the road unaided. These tests are much more difficult than they may first appear. Although each character retains their own skills and abilities, they see the world through the eyes of Billy, and should react accordingly. Bullies become huge, seemingly invincible foes. A busy street to cross becomes a highway of carnage, filled with endless vehicles traveling impossibly close together at insane speeds, carelessly colliding with unwary pedestrians as they attempt to cross.

If the characters are able to endure these tests, they will face the Guardian, the last thing standing between them and freedom. The Guardian is the thing Billy most fears in the world: his true self. His fearful dreamscape will create an exact replica of each character in every way, possessing all their skills and abilities, and knowing exactly how they will react to any given situation. In short, they must defeat themselves to escape. The only weakness of the Guardian is its inability to initiate violence. When encountered, it will taunt the character and try to block them from leaving, but if they remain calm and continue to walk past it without using force, the Guardian will eventually allow them to leave. Non-violent tactics will be reflected back upon the characters, as the guardian responds in kind. Lilim will see their own Needs, Elohim will be confronted with their own unswerving objectivity. However, the guardian can not be charmed or fooled. It has no Essence to be stolen, and persons attempting to fast-talk or seduce it may as well be attempting to fool themselves. Characters within the Labyrinth are immune to the forgetfulness that affects Billy's dreamscape, and regain their memories as soon as they enter.

The Barrier

This feature surrounds the city and prevents anyone from leaving. It is invisible and most people will not realize it is there, but anyone attempting to leave the city, either by foot, vehicle, or other power, will find themselves approaching the city as soon as they have passed its outskirts. The barrier exists in every direction from the city, so all means of escape are impossible, including such methods as flight or tunneling through the ground (do not discourage the characters from trying, though). The Barrier can not be destroyed or avoided by any known means.

The Library

The Library is the second largest building in the city, being slightly smaller than Billy's skyscraper. In this building is held the total of Billy's knowledge of the world, including his memories of his life and loved ones. An elderly man with a fierce temper, the Librarian, tends the books held here. Billy is afraid of the Librarian, and never sets foot inside the building. He is also aware on a subconscious level that the Library holds the key for his mind to end the dreamscape, therefore he has ordered a police guard to patrol the surrounding area, stopping, questioning and arresting anyone who tries to enter (except the Librarian). The Library closes each day at exactly 5:00 PM, and the Librarian will open its doors at precisely 8:00 AM the next day. The citizens of the city do not even think of going into the Library. If questioned about this, they will merely shrug and say, "There's nothing in there I need to know." It will take some ingenuity on the part of the player characters to safely enter the Library, but once inside the police will not attempt to harass them any further. The Library has a secret exit that leads to the basement of Billy's skyscraper, which the Librarian may or may not show the characters. This exit has enhanced the fear surrounding the building, because very few who enter have ever been seen to leave. Servitors of Destiny with the appropriate attunements may attempt to use the Library to travel to Yves' Library. If this occurs, there are two possible outcomes. Either the attempt fails completely (since this is simply another invalid attempt to exit the dreamscape), or the power of Billy's delusions draws images of Yves' Library from the mind of the servitor and temporarily places them in a false Library. Eventually they will learn the truth (Yves can not be found, the books don't feel quite right), and may easily return to Billy's Library.

Non-Player Characters

The Black Hole entrance to Billy's dreamscape has caught Celestials, mortals and even a few Ethereal spirits with its random movements. Those trapped Celestials who serve Blandine or Beleth have an advantage over other Celestials. Billy's dreamscape may be odd compared to normal dreams, but it is still Ethereal, and those Celestials experienced in interacting with dreams will find that their powers are still available. Most of the NPC Celestials caught in the

dreamscape have fallen victim to its forgetfulness, but several are still actively seeking answers.

William "Billy" Jackson

Corporeal Forces 1 (Strength 2, Agility 2)
Ethereal Forces 3 (Intelligence 5, Precision 6)
Celestial Forces 3 (Will 6, Perception 6)
Skills: Dreaming/6
Discord: (These are not true Discords, merely human equivalents.) Paranoia/2, Schizophrenic/5

Background: Billy was raised by his abusive father after his mother had died during childbirth. Regular beatings and emotional abuse caused Billy to retract into fantasy worlds of his own design. His skill in Dreaming and exceptionally high Ethereal and Celestial Forces were developed instinctively, at the cost of his physical body. Even when conscious, Billy rarely moves or speaks. Thrown into a coma following a car accident in which his father was killed, Billy has all but forgotten the world of pain and misery outside his head, and is happily living in his safe fantasy world. He is unaware of the impact his dreamscape is having on the Marches and unwary human dreamers, but is aware that the population of people in his realm that he has lesser control over is growing. Billy sees himself as a kind and generous ruler. His throne room is filled with people seeking an audience with him. Sitting at one end of the room, Billy will graciously see all those who ask, and will grant their request if it is within his power and it will not harm or upset the greater populace. He knows at a glance whether someone was created from his dream (his people), or if they have entered from outside. He is also able to tell if these intruders from outside are likely to cause trouble (they still have their memories), or if they have accepted his right to rule (they have forgotten who they are). Billy is still willing to talk to outsiders, but is wary of them.

Annekial

Elohite of Dreams

Corporeal Forces 1 (Strength 2, Agility 2)
Ethereal Forces 5 (Intelligence 10, Precision 10)
Celestial Forces 3 (Will 6, Perception 6)
Skills: Dodge/1, Emote/3, Fast-talk/4, Fighting/2, Lying/3, Move Silently/1
Songs: Charm (Ethereal/4), Dreams (Corporeal/4, Ethereal/5, Celestial/3), Healing (Ethereal/2).
Attunements: Elohite of Dreams, Healing Dream

Background: Annekial was one of the first creatures to be trapped within Billy's dreamscape. Within close proximity when the Hole opened, she investigated, only to be trapped within. She is very close to determining how to convince Billy to end the dream, but is rapidly falling victim to the forgetfulness inherent in this dreamscape. She has a -4 to her Will roll, for the purpose of remembering who she is. If found early in the adventure, she will be able to warn of the strange passing of time within this dreamscape, of Billy's delusions and of the various major features of the dreamscape, but is in very real danger of forgetting who she is.

Thargol

Balseraph of Nightmares

Corporeal Forces 2 (Strength 3, Agility 5)
Ethereal Forces 4 (Intelligence 9, Precision 7)
Celestial Forces 3 (Will 8, Perception 4)
Skills: Detect Lies/3, Dodge/3, Emote/2, Fast-talk/4, Savoir-Faire/3, Seduction/2

Songs: Charm (Ethereal/3, Celestial/2), Dreams(Celestial/4), Light (Ethereal/3)
Attunements: Balseraph of Nightmares, Dream Walking

Background: Thargol was caught by Billy's dreamscape when the nightmare he was manipulating drifted too close to the black hole. He quickly abandoned the torment of his previous dreamer and set to work discovering all he could about this strange dream. When he discovered Billy he sought to torment him, but soon discovered Billy's remarkable control over the events in his dream. Thargol has since developed a new plan and is now manipulating Billy, using his resonance and attunements, to inflict unreasoning fear on the others he has discovered trapped in this dream. He can often be found in Billy's throne room, acting the role of humble servant and adviser. He has yet to realize the danger of forgetting the outside world, and is at -2 to his daily Will rolls for remembering.

Rivarra

Ethereal Spirit

Corporeal Forces 1 (Strength 1, Agility 3)
Ethereal Forces 4 (Intelligence 6, Precision 10)
Celestial Forces 1 (Will 2, Perception 2)
Skills: Fighting/3, Dodge/3, Singing/1
Songs: Dreams (Corporeal/1), Dreams (Ethereal/1, Celestial/1)
Attunements: None

Background: Rivarra is a mischievous young ethereal spirit who escaped a mortal's dreamscape and has so far evaded the servants of both Blandine and Beleth. He ventured too close to Billy's dream and was drawn inside. He is actually one of the few creatures enjoying this experience. Due to some quirk of being an ethereal spirit with little comprehension of the outside world, Rivarra is immune to the forgetfulness that effects everyone else. He is having the time of his life. Rivarra befriended Billy when he first arrived, but was forced away when Thargol began manipulating Billy. Rivarra is looking for allies to help remove Thargol, but is instinctively wary of Celestials from both sides.

The Adventure

This adventure is largely unstructured, as there are virtually no limits to what the characters may attempt. They have to act fast, as each day they run the risk of forgetting who they were and settling down. The GM is encouraged to run this adventure loosely, reacting to any plan the characters come up with as they see fit, following the guidelines given above. The possibilities are endless.

The Aftermath

What happens if and when the characters escape depends largely on what side they are on. Divine characters reporting to Blandine will receive the greatest reward if they were able to convince Billy that his world was all a dream and safely bring him out of his coma. She will still be pleased if they are able to escape and bring her information. They may be asked to venture inside again, as they now know what to expect. Infernal characters reporting to Beleth will find that the Demon Princess is most pleased if they are able to give her extensive reports on what is occurring inside the dreamscape. She will be especially pleased if they are able to tell her about the forgetfulness, as she can use this as a means to rid herself of enemies and troublesome servants. She will not be happy if the characters have no useful information, or if they discover the effects of the realm yet manage to wake Billy, thereby eliminating a potentially useful dungeon. She will be pleased if the characters are able to convince or cajole Billy into becoming a Soldier of Nightmares. Again, GMs are encouraged to play this as it happens.

If the characters take longer than one day (Marches time), Blandine and Beleth will declare the area off limits to their servants, avoiding the danger while waiting for news. Waking Billy from his dreamscape will free any Celestials that have forgotten who they were. They will experience a period similar to Trauma, but will eventually recover. If Billy can be woken, he is an excellent candidate to become a trained Ethereal Soldier. He has already developed powerful skill in Dreaming and has a powerful collection of forces that could one day make him an influential Soldier in the shifting fields of the Marches.

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by Peter Flanagan

Art by [andi jones](#)

Some Gamemasters are fortunate. They have groups of players who understand the need for cooperation to make the adventure run smoothly. Still, even in the best groups, troubles can arise. A new player can disrupt the game flow without intending to, or an experienced member might let other frustrations leak into their character.

In addition, most GMs aren't so lucky. They don't have to be bad people to be troublesome players, but they can still wreak havoc on a campaign or a gaming group. The Power Gamer. The Rules Lawyer. The Nihilist. The Wallflower. The Combat Monster. Many Gamemasters dread seeing any of these player types enter the game, but they can often go unrecognized until the Combat Monster has blown away the diplomat the party was supposed to guard or the Rules Lawyer interrupts the climactic dogfight to argue turn ratios, and then the GM has to clean up the mess. If possible. But it helps to remember a few things.

First of all, a person whose playing style involves one of the classic extremes above doesn't even have to be a bad player *per se.* The problem lies in the extremity, not the style. So maybe, especially with a new player, a simple talk can smooth things over. But if it doesn't, it becomes necessary to deal with the situation. Fortunately, the situations aren't as hard to deal with as they sometimes seem, given the chance to think them over.

At this point, analyze the situation. The "problem" gamers may not be the cliches that they first seem. Someone who appears to be a power gamer might just want to play in campaigns with more "neat stuff," like higher levels of psi, magic and/or tech, or an apparent rules lawyer might just like tinkering with systems. If that's the case, the situation becomes less one of dealing with an extremist and more one of accommodating different gaming styles.

However, when a GM runs into a genuinely disruptive player, dealing with the problem is considerably more difficult. While removing a player may seem satisfying at times, it can be far more difficult than it sounds, and real-life hurt feelings can be a lot harder to salvage than a campaign idea.

The Power Gamer

Some players just aren't satisfied in any game unless they're all-powerful. Even in a game where the characters are beginners (low levels or point costs), the power gamer tries to find a way to be able to conquer the universe. They may not *intend* to destroy everything in their path, but want to be able to if necessary. Naturally, such a character makes any adventure moot, as the omnipotent PC immediately solves any problem.

Sometimes, the power gamer just wants the character to be "unkillable." Characters can be a huge emotional investment; if the player doesn't want the character to die, and you're willing to be flexible, you can negotiate this in advance. The character may be killable within the rules, but the GM can make sure it doesn't happen, or create a "survival luck" advantage that lets the character survive otherwise-certain death. Obviously, this sort of thing depends heavily on the campaign type. Such reality bending is much more likely to fit into '40s cliffhangers than gritty cyberpunk campaigns. Either way, if the player is trying to be unstoppable rather than just unkillable, the original problem resurfaces.

Sometimes, a power gamer is also a rules lawyer -- the better to create an invincible character -- but as often as not the gamer is just clever, using anything available in character to become unstoppable. Such a player, if unable to be omnipotent from the outset, can marshal resources, remain in the shadows, and wait until the "master plan" is ready to venture forth and take over. Reasonable tactics, but not particularly heroic or adventurous.

The first thing to do is monitor the power gamer's character creation closely. If the campaign is meant to be run at a fairly high power level, you might wish to limit the number of points that can be spent on any one ability, or conversely avoid allowing too broad a range of powers. Telepathic CEOs, magi of high noble rank, and any sorts of gadgeteers are to be watched carefully. Also, one of the primary tactics of the power gamer is explaining how no one else should have thought of what they did, because it's so clever.

Don't listen.

Anything the power gamer can come up with, someone can easily have tried already. If they succeeded, they're running things. If they didn't, someone took them out. Either way, look for chinks in their armor and exploit them mercilessly. If none are to be found, the GM can always come up with someone more powerful than the gamer who's discovered the same thing, or another equally diabolic scheme. Another possible solution is to let the power gamer succeed for a little while, then let Darwin take over. Eventually, one of the character's enemies is going to prove faster, stronger, or smarter.

Finally, remember that the tone of the game should play heavily into the solution. In a supers campaign, for example, some cosmic entity can decide that the power gamer's doing a little too well, and *that* can lead into a grand adventure that just happens to dismantle the best-laid plans. In a game devoted to scheming, the power-gamer mentality will be everywhere, so having some other foolproof plan run into the gamer's is simple enough. Campaigns that fall in between the two extremes can usually be salvaged by a combination of these two solutions.

The Rules Lawyer

Campaign Killers

A power gamer can be annoying, but generally they're not actively working against game flow, at least in the short term. A rules lawyer, on the other hand, is a constant nuisance. Someone who knows the rules intimately can be an enormous asset, if they're working with the GM. However, the classic rules lawyer waits for someone to make a mistake, then pounces, disrupting the scene and forcing everyone to pull out their books to look for the usually obscure rule cited. Now, a good GM admits a mistake and moves on. But sometimes decisions have to be made on the fly, especially considering how clever players are. When the party goes into East Nowhere and the GM hasn't put anything on the map but the name, some fast decisions need to be made, which the lawyer can exploit. Worse, sometimes the rules lawyer turns on the party, and explains how the clever and imaginative solution a player devised can't work because of the Paper Clip Stress rule on page 427.

The problem with rules lawyers is that, usually, they're technically right. And while the trend in gaming is away from hard-and-fast game mechanics, sometimes those mechanics are necessary, especially in combat. Then the lawyer can slow things down interminably. The solution lies in understanding the type of rules lawyer you're up against.

Rules lawyer type one is just big on rules, and is only a problem when they impose that obsessiveness on the group. Two solutions involve going to the opposite spectrums of the gaming world-use a detailed system and let the *lawyer* handle the details if they're fast enough, or use a less rules-intensive system and cease to worry about the lawyer. The

primary difficulty with these options is that the situation may frustrate someone eventually. The most important thing to do, however, is to make the decision *in advance*. This sort of rules lawyer will usually respect such a decision. After all, the GM is the arbiter of the rules, and has clarified the situation.

The second variety of rules lawyer is more pernicious, but ultimately easier to deal with. This is a variety of the power gamer, but rather than using the rules to construct a more powerful character, he finds loopholes and seeks out errors to make sure that conflicts go in favor of the character. Many of the tactics mentioned for power gamers are useful against this variety of rules lawyer, but the primary thing to remember is who the arbiter of the rules is. Chances are, the players will side with the GM, since this variety of rules lawyer often uses the rules against them as well. The first type of rules lawyer is ultimately honest, while this player is twisting the rules. An effective tactic that should be used sparingly is the creation of an enemy who either is too simple for the rules lawyer to get a handle on (bruisers are great for this), or uses every loophole the lawyer's character does. Give lawyer two enough rope, then hang 'em high.

The Nihilist

Some players can't stand it when things go right. The character, and often the player, bemoans cruel fate while ensuring that fate is never kind. With the ascent of "dark" roleplaying, the nihilist has become increasingly prevalent, and there's nothing wrong with pathos now and again. Nevertheless, the nihilist doesn't seem happy unless the character is a maimed, cursed, hideous outcast whose only love died a horrific death.

If the player is enjoying the game, then the solution is easy: *let* the character be depressed. The most important thing is to ensure that the nihilist doesn't ruin the fun for everyone else. Nihilists can easily get out of hand, trying to make every other character as depressing and paranoid as theirs. Any attempts to sabotage other party members' personalities should be stopped cold. The GM's options here vary widely. Don't hand the group victory, but make sure that there's some light even in the darkest world. Any actual assaults, physical or otherwise, by the nihilist (or any other player) on a party member should be dealt with decisively, unless that's the type of campaign being run. Even then, vindictive subversion of more cheerful characters should receive low tolerance at best. Give other characters perception rolls, or have any mentors/allies step in, or just bring in a captain of the watch who happens to be the best fighter any of them has ever seen.

The problem worsens when the *player* is depressing. If the character is honestly trying, but the player's luck is rotten, cut the potential nihilist some slack. A few victories can prevent hard feelings. Still, some people seem to refuse to cheer up, and this variety of nihilist can kill a campaign. Fortunately, most of the suggestions above work just as well against a demoralizing player. The added difficulty comes from dealing with players who damn if they do and damn if they don't. If success brings complaints about the "lack of realism" and failure causes "I told you so" gloating, there's not much to do besides ignoring the out-of-character nonsense. Deliberately killing characters is usually not an effective tactic, but with a player nihilist it may be the only option. Pleasing this person is virtually impossible; don't give yourself an ulcer trying.

The Wallflower

There may not be one in *every* party, but they're fairly common. A regular's significant other joins to be with the loved one, or a novice is having trouble getting their character into the game, or someone is just shy. The wallflower isn't the annoyance a rules lawyer or a nihilist is, but a player who just sits there isn't really playing.

Engaging a wallflower might prove to be simple, or extraordinarily difficult, depending on how much the player *wants* to be involved. Inexperienced wallflowers often have excellent roleplayers hidden within. Providing the player with an interesting subplot revolving around their character may well result in the wallflower becoming a driving force in the campaign. The most important thing to do is get the player interested in what's happening around the character. Engage the emotions. Try not to put the player on the spot by dropping the fate of the party/city/world/universe on that character's shoulders, at least not at first. Once the player can become their character, by the time the chips are down, the ex-wallflower will be taking names.

The situation is more difficult with players who are there for someone else, or are having trouble for other reasons. If the initial attempts to involve the character don't take, talk to the player. Find out what the wallflower is interested in. An overwhelmed newbie will probably appreciate the effort, and other players can help you help them. Remember, even an experienced gamer can get lost in a new system or setting. And if nothing else, the wallflower is relatively harmless. As long as no feelings are hurt, it may be just as well to leave quiet players alone.

The Combat Monster

Perhaps the most dreaded of beasts to many roleplayers, the combat monster exists for one purpose: destruction. Psychological motivations for hack-and-slash players abound, but the upshot is that the combat monster wants to take arms against a sea of troubles and end them decisively. But many slashers are not nearly as dangerous to a campaign as they seem. In fact, the combat monster can be the most innocuous of "disruptions." Many, if left alone during roleplaying, will simply wait for the next fight scene and cut loose then. Like many predators, the combat monster is only dangerous if annoyed. If not given at least one fight per session, or if attempts to force roleplaying are made, the combat monster can become vicious, lashing out at NPCs or even offending players.

The combat monster usually becomes a problem because of certain situations. If a hack-and-slash gamer tries to fight their way through deathtraps and cocktail parties, this is obviously going to inconvenience the other players. If the rest of the party can't deal with the combat monster for one reason or another, having the character (and the next two or three subsequent ones, if necessary) get annihilated by said deathtrap or the small army of well-armed guards should provide the player with a clue. Fortunately, the combat monster player usually sees the character as a collection of numbers, so the emotional impact should be minor. Also, "feeding" the combat monster on occasion with a dose of high-octane action should encourage patience during the lulls.

Other difficulties arise with another power gamer mix. The combat monster/power gamer is a rather unsettling combination, especially since a combat monster is optimized to begin with. A smart combat monster can be as unbalancing as any other power gamer, as the threats that can challenge the slasher may well turn the other players into paste. Fortunately, in most cases, the solution is simple. The antagonist has something special to deal with the combat monster specifically. This will give the slasher great pleasure as the character gets to cut loose, while the other players can do other things that need to be done without being blown away.

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These are all suggestions meant to deal with player difficulties without having to remove anyone, including the GM, from the game. Hopefully, any given gaming group is compatible enough to get around these problems, but ultimately roleplaying is a game, and if it's not fun any more, then it may be time for someone to leave the group.

But it doesn't hurt to try to work things out first.

by Fred Wolke

Starfire. Full Thrust. Battlefleet: Gothic. There are a lot of games out there that let you play out a space battle between massed fleets of ships. Of course, if you buy pewter miniatures for these games, your budget is going to take a big hit -- a single ship can cost between six and ten dollars.

Ouch!

It doesn't have to be this way.

A *long* time ago, a game came out called ***Traveller 2300.*** Since it didn't have much to do with the ***Traveller*** universe, they eventually changed the name to just ***2300.*** All in all, a fair game, interesting background, lousy mechanics. What was important about it to me, though, was that in one of the supplements (it's been a long time, forgive me) they had some recommendations on how to build a starship miniature out of a golf tee. It was a fairly simple operation. Cut the golf tee off where the taper on the big end merges into the shaft. Glue the middle of the shaft to the narrow end of the other piece, prime, paint, and there you go . . . a nifty starship miniature that cost you about ten cents, max. They recommended making smaller ships by cutting the length of the shaft down.

When I picked up ***Starfire*** a while back, I remembered that article, and decided I would build a set of miniatures to use with it. The bases of the miniatures were perfect for the 1/2" hexgrid ***Starfire*** used, and it came out pretty good. I felt that something was missing, however. The ships all looked pretty much the same. The carriers, for example, seemed to have no way to launch or recover their fighters. I built a few more minis, using some flat wooden coffee-stirrers to make landing pads and launch decks. I built more minis using multiple golf tees. My Dremel tool was invaluable for making the precision cuts required, as was my 2-1/2" table vise.

I built flights of fighters by gluing toothpick-tips to bits of transparent plastic in sixes, and gluing that to a golf-tee base.

Never got to use them. ***Starfire*** isn't exactly a popular game. That was about two years ago.

I just recently picked up ***Full Thrust*** (and the supplement, ***More Thrust***) and while it's a little overpriced at almost $20 for just 48 pages each, it's a terrific system. Fast-paced, generic, and elegant. I can't wait to play it.

Which means, of course, that I've begun making more miniatures. I can't

stop myself.

For **Starfire,** I built one blue fleet, and one red fleet. This one is white. I got the obligatory smaller ships out of the way, then got to work on my favorites, the dreadnoughts. More configurations, larger ships. I discovered that bamboo skewers offer all kinds of possibilities for structural elements.

Sometimes, a larger mini will be unstable. By gluing a penny to the bottom of the base, I got a decent stability without adding too much to the footprint.

My latest construction is the "Brokkian Ultra-dreadnought." It's about 50 times the size of a "standard" golf-tee miniature, built from a bit of plastic taken from a **Hot Wheels** track set my son had broken. I added some half-toothpicks, a pair of golf tee points for engines, and some paint. For this miniature, I wanted the turrets to show up. Eventually, I struck upon the solution. I took one of those metal chains made from little balls strung together, cut the balls apart with wire cutters, and glued them to the sides, top, and bottom of the dreadnought.

Until now, all three fleets have been constructed with golf tees, toothpicks, and bamboo skewers. Adding in paint, primer, and glue, I've probably constructed all 100 or so miniatures for about $25. They're not as pretty as pewter minis, but they didn't cost me hundreds of dollars, either. I only broke my "no-pewter" rule once -- I found a pack of 36 fighters for the **Harpoon** game for $8.95, and I couldn't resist.

Now I'm keeping my eyes open for other bits of plastic and such that I can use for more minis. I still don't have a space station I'm satisfied with, especially since I want something fairly large. But there's hope.

by Brad Glenn

Art by [andi jones]

An excellent change for a tired superhero campaign is to shock the heroes by dropping them into a horror realm. This Horror/Supers crossover has been vaguely mentioned in *GURPS Supers, Second Edition,* but not fully examined by any means. This genre mix can be an exciting variation for the players, and a fun change for the GM.

Why Horror and Supers together? Strangely, they have a lot in common. Both deal with obvious battles of good versus evil, and have various individuals, often with strange powers. The real joy of a Horror campaign, or Horror movie for that matter, is getting scared, and the rush of adrenaline that comes with that. The mystery, the strange, secret powers, the forces of evil, all together create an intriguing world. Why Supers? The joy of imagining your character flying over a city, jumping from building to building, the creation of new powers and origins, the fight against evil, the rush of power after lifting up a tank. These two genres mix together well! Take an ominous horror, while powerful people fight against it, protecting humanity from pain, torment, mass insanity, and destruction by malevolent forces. This is truly a job for super-heroes!

Character Creation

When starting up a normal Supers campaign, usually everyone has a Supers Archetype they wish to play. "I wish to play a speed guy," or "I want to play someone like Plastic-Man," is commonly heard around the table. There's nothing wrong with archetypes, as most of them are interesting and fun to play. For a Horror adventure, I suggest making the characters a little more original, and with a little more personality. I'm not knocking the Flash or anyone, but normally comic book characters are two-dimensional: it's practically part of the genre. But, in the conversion to Horror, the characters should change into fully fleshed out three-dimensional characters. They will have different demands upon them, and different needs within the game. If someone wants to play a basic punch-'em-out superhero, they may be disappointed to end up running from supernatural horrors.

Normally, I persuade my players to take on such characters as Supers with mental disadvantages, or misunderstood creatures. Strange powers and diminished defenses make the heroes much more accustomed to fleeing in the face of impending doom, rather than fighting demons face-to-face. A hero who fights a demon face-to-face is known as a dead hero. Demons are usually way too powerful for direct contact. Ask every character to take at least a minor phobia. Everyone I know seems to have minor fears, why not superheroes? Give them realistic ambitions, jobs, daily lives. Make sure everyone knows their character well enough to know their eye color. This is the only way to really get a well developed character. Now it may not happen the first game. Usually for me, it takes a few games to know a character, and even then I half-ignore my disadvantages because the character has found his or her own disadvantages, which usually are far more detrimental than those written on my sheet.

Another interesting technique for Horror/Supers is to try to make the Supers off balance with each other, not completely trusting of one another. This adds even more intrigue into the game. This can easily be accomplished with secret disadvantages, delusions, compulsive behaviors (like lying) and other disadvantages. Why does one of the heroes disappear every time there's a full moon out? It could simply be a quirk that they like walking in the full moon, or they could be a werewolf, living dead, spawn of Yugthugyug, whatever. I make it a rule that characters are never allowed to see each others' sheets, and I often write down secret disadvantages as simply "Secret" and then remember what it is. I once had a eunuch character who was deathly afraid that people would find out about his problem, and I played him for over a year with no one discovering it.

Magicians or witches/wizards are always a good bet for a super-team fighting in realms of the unknown. They can sense when magic is being used, or the presence of magical creatures. Usually, they are less capable in the raw power department, but they more than make up for it in diversity. I allow a super-mage to take nearly any spell, as long as they have the prerequisites, but on top of that, they may also take powers from the Supers system you're using, to give them equitable strengths. A magic lighting bolt may only go up to 3d6, but a Supers lightning bolt may go as high as the character has points to spend. Or a GM may wish to do away with limitations on magical powers, so a mage may do as much damage with a lightning bolt as they wish, as long as they have the fatigue to keep going. Remember, super-mages should always buy extra fatigue!

Psis are also a good standby, as they are usually present in both comics and horror related material. Psi-sniffers are good for detecting psionic activity, and telepaths and psychomotrists make excellent detectives. Psionic powers can easily emulate any super-power, and still have a more realistic feel to it.

For a beginning Horror/Supers game, I would suggest to limit the Supers to a 250 point maximum in *GURPS* -- convert this to your own system if you're using something else), thus limiting how much power they can have. Also, restrict the accessibility to powers such as flying, teleportation, or insubstantiality. These powers make it extremely difficult to capture the heroes in horrifying situations. I often have difficulty with teleporters in RPGs, as it is too easy to deactivate a situation by teleporting away. You want to scare the players, and having a Superhero hovering over 30 zombies while billowing fire down upon them isn't scary. Now being stuck in the middle of 30 zombies . . . that's scary! I have found that one flyer will suffice for a four to six player team, but make sure that they cannot lift the entire team and bring them along for the flight. Compared to a flying team, an earthbound team will be far more frightened when fighting flying creatures.

Heroes in Hell

Villains and Antagonists

The heroes are going to need opposition, and that means creatures in the Horror genre, and Supervillains in the comic-book genre. These two antagonists can be mixed together in various forms to create really interesting opposition.

When creating an enemy, the first thing I consider is the powers, and how they interact with the characters. For the horror genre I imagine strange hooks, cutting implements, and other gory tools of pain. A nasty guy with a pitchfork is good for a normal human, but a super-hero is going to zap this poor fool from 30 feet away and be done with him. To get around this, you might have the hero surrounded by 50 nasty guys with pitchforks, but after one or two adventures like that, the heroes are going to get more area-effect powers and that will be the end of that. The enemies have to be more devious than that. Invisibility is a good tool of a villain, as are darkness powers, body of shadow, and other powers that make the enemy difficult to find. People suddenly being decapitated by an invisible person with an axe is scary, because you never know if the killer is right in front of you.

Anything mind-control oriented is usually good. Really good illusions and hallucinations can be used to mislead the heroes, making them believe one thing, and then the complete opposite. Having someone stumble upon a horribly disfigured body covered with maggots and grue is scary, but when they run to get their teammates, and return to find it gone, and the room totally clean and fresh-smelling: that will unnerve them.

There are also thousands of possibilities for Supervillains that don't fit the comic-book norm, but do fit into the Supers/Horror crossover. Normally these type of enemies don't wear "costumes" so much as they have horrific bodies,

or wear clothes appropriate for their powers. One such villain I created is Cross-Stitch, who wears sewn-together rags, which fits with his character conception. Notice that Cross-Stitch does have his horrific giant needle to skewer people on, but he can also sew their eyes shut, sew their limbs to their bodies in a binding attack, or throw thousands of tiny needles to stick into a person to avoid being followed. He does have his gory attack, but also enough special effects to make him interesting. Freddy Krueger from *Nightmare on Elm Street* is another good example. He has a metal claw for damage, and dream powers, which would make an excellent adventure. When you think about it, most horror movies focus on a being with powers, so the enemies are not that difficult to come up with.

When I make up a character, I simply think of four categories. Attack, Defense, Movement, and Special. To have an interesting yet potent villain, they should have something from each of these categories. They must be a threat, which pertains to attack, and they must be able to survive an attack, their defense. They must be able to flee/follow the heroes, sometimes leaping out from nowhere. This is their movement. And finally their special is something that really distinguishes them from the other flying hook guys. Maybe your villain has an choking stench of death, or is made from solid stone. Something to make them interesting.

Now that you have come up with enough powers, the horror genre dictates that they must come from somewhere. In a comic-book, often creatures just appear, or a villain just invents some story to trap the hero. The villain's origin in a crossover will probably have to be much more thought out, and intrinsic to the plot. For some, the origin isn't that important though, like an insane Psi. They, most likely, were born with psionic abilities. On the other hand, something opened a portal to the dimension of Yugthugyug, and the adventure there would probably involve finding out who did it, how to close it, while dodging those horrible spawn of Yugthugyug.

Sometimes an interesting origin can be the entire basis for a story. For example, I am working on a game where Sister Twine was raised from the dead by a mysterious tree called the Xikum (also known as the Yggdrasil). She now has horrific powers; evil blue ghost babies floating around her, ready to do her bidding. Once the heroes are swarmed by these blue babies, they will be scared. But the plot follows the line that Sister Twine wants more power, so she wants to get to this tree. If she gets there, she will be able to raise an entire army of dead, so the heroes should stop her. The plot is much more complicated than that, but her origin is an intrinsic part of the plot.

Creating Scenarios

As I stated earlier, horror plots generally surround the creation of the antagonist. There's a black slime gurgling up through the sewers and dissolving people into skeletons. Plot? What is this thing, how did it get here, and how is it stopped? The antagonist itself creates the plot.

But, more interesting, a villain can be a character in the plot. Villains should also have ambitions, so their needs can be interesting plot devices without actually being the plot. Take for instance, an evil freak-show, led by a deformed, mindless, eight-foot-tall man with a small baby head growing out of his neck. He has the strength of five men, and the baby gives him an IQ of 20. Scary and gross, but if he were to rampage the streets, a cop could easily subdue him. He gets his freak friends to enter the city and search out a freak that left the circus ten years ago, and stole with him a strange mystical egg. According to the freak-man, the egg is preparing to hatch, and it will unleash a creature so horrible that to look upon it is to go insane. There's the plot, and the heroes have to discover what is going on, search for the wayward freak, and deal with the inevitable hatching of the creature. Meanwhile, they antagonists will want to stop the heroes, and will send their own freaks after them, but the more freaks fighting the heroes, the less there are to search for the egg. The GM must decide how the antagonists react, and how desperate they are for the egg.

In that instance, the actions of the heroes affect the actions of the villains, instead of a static plot where the actions of an unthinking enemy would go along the same lines no matter what the heroes do. This, unfortunately, is much harder to GM, but much more interesting and realistic for the players.

One of my favorite Horror/Supers style plots are ones where the players doubt reality. One I came up with is called "From the Mouths of Babes," where a group of powerful psionic children are gathered by a mysterious leader, and the heroes are brought into the campaign through mind-control, hallucinations, and various other psionic powers. One hero wakes up with an axe in his hand, and three hacked up bodies around him. Another finds his dead wife is alive, and

hiding from him. A third hero has every fear she ever had show up and attack her. In each instance, the heroes doubted themselves, each other, and reality. Would you feel safe around a person who is accused of murder, but can't remember doing it?

There is an old line that says "avoid clichés like the plague." This holds true in a game. Sure, zombies are scary, but the second time you encounter zombies they are much less scary -- just hack them up and get on with things. Vampires, werewolves, and mummies are all expected in a Horror game. Instead, give the players something that they don't expect. Give them tentacled creatures, veiny blood-spurting humanoids and amorphous clouds with thousands of clawed hands and a giant bull's head. If you want to use a cliché villain, make them as interesting as you can, and don't let the heroes know what they are up against. Sure, that woman in the trenchcoat and fedora seems to be invulnerable to bullets and can turn into a cloud of mist, but who is going to suspect she is a vampire? The team possibly will, but if enough super-humans are encountered, they might just think she has super-powers. Still, if they figure out she's a vampire, she will be much less interesting. "Break out the stakes," the super-heroes yawn.

Horror/Supers plots should be misleading, scary, threatening, and keep the heroes somewhat off balance. They should play upon personal fears of both the characters and the players and, presumably, of the GM.

Scaring the Players

Scaring the players should mainly rely upon an intriguing, twisting plot, but to enhance that fear, several "helpers" are available.

Lighting: There is a problem of how much light to have. You have to be able to read your character sheet and plot notes, but sitting under fluorescent lights isn't very scary. Candles are excellent mood-setters, but they aren't all that bright, and there is a small chance of fire with open flames and all those pieces of paper. Even with these problems, I still choose candle-light, and a soft light in the background. The candles give an aura that electric lights just don't have. One main candelabra for a centerpiece, and three or four other candles on window-ledges seem to be enough. You can try it without an electric light, or turn off the lights during a scary bit. (I once faced a demon while inside of a pentagram, and the GM turned off all the lights and left only one small candle to light the room, and it worked quite well: he portrayed the demon with excellent horrific qualities!) This is still a bit of a distraction. Although I have never tried this, I have always thought about having those clip-on book lights on clip-boards for the characters to read what is on their sheets, but otherwise just use candlelight.

Props: These are excellent little touches that add to the game a lot. Setting the room up with subtle, tasteful items that pertain to the game give a good psychological undercurrent. I have a ceramic skull I bring out and set on the table: it's a little blatant, but everyone knows it, so it doesn't seem out of place, and reminds players of the genre. The GM should also make up small props for the game whenever appropriate. If the players are to retrieve an ancient map, try to give them one that looks as authentic as possible. Pour strong tea over paper to get that old-fashioned look, burn the edges, use home-made paper, anything. It doesn't have to be perfect. Computers often have interesting fonts, and can emulate old-fashioned writing, so even though they look like computer printouts, the players will forgive you. In past games, I have used such props as paper-mache masks, false scars and wounds from Halloween costume packages, hoods and capes, and a small, silver skull with "magical properties."

Music: Often music can be distracting, detracting from the mood instead of adding to it. You have to find the proper music to make it helpful. Our local library carries records (remember them?) of movie soundtracks, and they have a decent selection of horror movie soundtracks. I go through them, and make cassette tapes to play during the games. You actually have to listen to the songs before putting them on, because there are often ones that don't fit. Play them quietly in the background, and soon the players will forget they are listening to the music, and just react on a subconscious level. (On a side note: I have played these tapes while driving at night- bad idea!) The problem is that occasionally you have to get up to change the tape, unless you have an auto-rewind. I keep the tape-deck handy, so that I can quickly flip the tape. I have five or six tapes, and that seems to be enough that the players don't get sick of hearing them. Another use of music is to play music that is being played in the game. If the characters are in a noisy nightclub, play nightclub music, loud! Also, I got a tape of a performer called Diamanda Galas, who put out an album called *The Litanies of Satan.* She sounds exactly as I would imagine a horrific demon sounding. Pick it up if you can

find it. It's very difficult to listen to, but as a demon howling in a dungeon cell, she's excellent.

Problems that May Arise

There may be a few problems integrating superheroes into a Horror game. They may not enjoy the change from being nearly all-powerful to running away from monolithic horrors. These can be dealt with in different ways.

The players may not be too pleased to learn that they must now make fright checks. They may have gotten used to fighting supervillains in another campaign, and being incredibly brave in the face of nasty space robots and super-Vikings. Unfortunately, you must enforce fright checks, as they are no longer fighting regular villains, but terrifying creatures. They may not need to make fright checks when facing normal villains (like the super-Vikings), but when confronted with Lovecraftian-styled creatures it should be frightening to the heroes. If you describe it well, the players should have no problem, because hopefully you will scare them as well. The writhing tentacles dragging people down into the sewers should be described well enough, and in the right atmosphere that the players are scared enough to understand how their characters may be frightened as well.

Scaring the players may be difficult. I have found that once players have powers, they feel invulnerable to outside forces; this must be curbed in order for the heroes to enjoy the game. Allow them a chance to flaunt their powers, but make sure they understand that however powerful they are, there are more powerful forces in the universe, and malevolent ones! You can prey upon their weaknesses, trapping them and wounding them. Let them know that they are vulnerable, and that they can be killed. I don't suggest killing a character just to show them that there can be fatalities in the game, in fact I actively suggest you don't, but also don't shy away from killing them either. If a character does something stupid, or rolls terribly at an inopportune moment, you have to be brave enough to give out consequences. If a character is hanging upside-down from bridge above a thousand foot chasm by his knees, then critically fails his acrobatics roll, chances are he's going to fall, and unless he can somehow slow his fall or get saved by his teammates, you may have to splatter him across the rocks. Let the players know before they get into the game that it may be deadly, and not to get too frustrated if a fatality occurs.

One problem that often arises with almost every Horror team that I've encountered is the feeling of powerlessness the players have when trying to influence the outcome of the game. It is a prerequisite that the players must be challenged to enjoy the game, but superheroes should still have some power, or else it would just be a normal Horror game. One way to confront this is to start the game with a smaller challenge, such as stopping a bank robbery or some other criminal activity. This way the characters get to show off their powers, gain a little prestige in the public eye, and have a bit of a power trip. Nothing wrong with that. When the players get comfortable with their power, hit them with the creatures, the horrors. Show them that the forces at hand are powerful, but that a normal human would be too frail to deal with it, and only a superhero stands a chance, and not even much of a chance. This style shows the players that their characters are forceful, just dealing with powers beyond their control. Give them smaller tasks during the game as well. The fire-breathing demon may set a building on fire, and the heroes can take pleasure in saving humans. This will allow them power, but still they know that the demon is much more powerful.

Conclusion

The main duty of a Supers/Horror crossover game is to be frightening to the players, yet still containing the inventiveness and powers of a comic-book realm. Through the introduction of terrifying villains, and monsters in keeping with both the Supers genre and the Horror genre, a GM should have little difficulty maintaining both genres within the same game. The point is to have fun, so if something occurs that doesn't fit the genre, but is fun, go with it. Let the characters stop a bank robbery, save a cat from a tree, do normal superhero things if they want to, but also allow them the challenges that come with a really good Horror campaign. Don't become too slowed down with fighting, instead have battles resolve quickly, and then get onto scarier problems. Focus on frightening the heroes, but let them fight if they really want to. The main idea is to enjoy the game, for both the GM and for the players. Give them the leeway to dictate their characters actions, and their world to a point, but also allow yourself to make up enjoyable and scary scenarios to fit them into.

The Secrets of Gaard

by Brandon Cope

Art by [andi jones]

This mini-campaign requires only the *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition, Revised* and *GURPS Space, Second Edition. GURPS Space Bestiary* and *GURPS Ultra-Tech* are useful but not required. Any page reference with a "B" refers to the *Basic Set,* while a "S" refers to *Space.*

This is presented as a mini-campaign rather than a structured adventure to allow a more "open-ended" exploration of the star system. Specific adventure ideas are given at the end of the article. Since more adventure time is likely to be spent on Reginald, it is more detailed than the other planets. As Gaard was considered uninhabitable for so many years, it can be easily placed in an ongoing campaign, though it shouldn't be located near any important systems (at least 6-10 days FTL travel away).

TL10 is assumed to be average for the campaign. If your campaign isn't TL10 or differs from the "standard" TL10 (as per p.S26), make changes as needed. The term "Alliance" will be used to denote the galactic government, for convenience.

Previous Exploration

The Gaard system was first visited by the Xinos (see below), a dying raced hunted by the Verm (see *GURPS Aliens*). They settled in the system as a place of last defense, but the Verm never arrived and, eventually, the last Xinos died. Several centuries passed . . .

About 60 years ago, a one-man Alliance Survey ship spent about two weeks doing orbital scans but no landings were made. Since this was the scout's last job before some long overdue R&R, the survey was rushed. On the basis of the incomplete data, the Survey Service felt that the world was not worth the effort of colonization and labeled it such.

Recently, another Survey ship was sent in to update the first report, and it did a much more thorough job. The reports of high levels of useful metals on Gaard Ia and III caused the Survey Service to reclassify the system as "limited colonization: potential mining."

The Star System

Star Name: Gaard **Type:** M7V **Location:** as desired by GM
Biozone: 0.1-0.2 AU **Inner Limit:** 0 **Number of Planets:** 6

Planet	Orbit	Dist	Type	Diameter	Density	Gravity
Reginald	1a	0.1	earthlike	7,100	6.4	1.04
Bernard	1b	0.1	rockball	1,200	4.1	0.11

Franklin	2	0.45	hostile terrestrial	5,700	2.5	0.33
Aldo	3	0.8	icy rockball	2,300	6.8	0.35
Jerald	4	1.5	gas giant	52,000	2.1	2.5
Marbles	5	2.9	asteroid belt	--	--	--
Johnathan	6	5.7	gas giant	46,000	1.9	2.0

Reginald (Gaard Ia)

This is the most habitable planet in the system. It is tide-locked, with a 21-day year and a 3 degree axial tilt and no seasons. However, the dense (1.7 earth-pressure) atmosphere rotates clockwise around the planet, following the planet's small moon which completely orbits Reginald once every 24 Earth hours (since the planet does not rotate, its day is measured by the orbit time of its moon). The atmosphere is composed of 71% nitrogen and 25% oxygen, breathable with slight aid (see p.S108).

Eighty-five percent of the surface is covered by water, and humidity is over 90%, resulting in near-constant rain on the light side and snow on the dark side, with some of either on the strip of perpetual twilight. Along this strip, the temperature is 82 degrees and the predominant terrain is jungle. On the light side of the planet, temperature is 146 degrees, while on the dark side it averages 17 degrees.

The temperatures aren't as extreme as one would expect on a tide-locked world, since the rotation of the atmosphere helps to balance things out. However, this also causes high winds (15-40 mph is common) and frequent storms. Most natural resources are scarce or absent, except for industrial and light metals which are extremely plentiful.

The highest observable natural life forms are lower mammals, which primarily inhabit the seas and jungles. However, a developing race, numbering about 20,000, lives in extensive tunnel systems under the planet's surface. They are described below. Most of the land surface is covered by jungle, with a fair amount of plains. There are very few mountains and no signs of recent (within 10,000 years) volcanic activity.

Bernard (Gaard Ib)

This is Reginald's single moon. If studied carefully, a single ziggurat will be found on the surface near some old meteor craters (see below for details).

Franklin (Gaard II)

This planet is of little value or note. It has few metals, and its weak magnetic field subjects it to very high levels of radiation. It has a trace methane atmosphere. There are no ruins on the planet.

Aldo (Gaard III)

The outermost terrestrial-type planet, it has large amounts of heavy metals and no atmosphere. There are no ruins on the planet. Even if Gaard Ia is closed to mining, Aldo would probably be opened up.

Jerald (Gaard IV)

A medium gas giant comprised of hydrogen-helium, it has a spectacular ring formation but very few satellites: six moonlets and two moons, one small and one medium. One of the moonlets, perhaps captured from the asteroid belt, has a radically inclined orbit, at 62 degrees to the system's plane.

Marbles (Gaard V)

The belt mainly is of stony/iron composition with a very sparse collection of asteroids.

Johnathan (Gaard VI)

Another medium gas giant, this one's atmosphere is primarily hydrogen. It's only unusual feature is a large number of moons: 13 moonlets, six small, five medium and three large moons.

Xinos Ruins on Reginald (Gaard IA)

Careful ground exploration of Reginald's jungles in the twilight strips will reveal stone structures partly covered by centuries of growth. While the materials used were simple stone, there are signs that the actual construction was very high tech (using laser and fusion cutters).

The Secrets of Gaard

These structures are ziggurats, 34.56 or 69.12 feet per side along the (square) base, with the height equal to the base length. The only entrance is through a 213-lb stone slab at the pinnacle of the structures which covers a vertical shaft. Deep notches are cut into one of the shaft walls to be used as foot- and handholds.

The shaft stops at ground level, and a single short dead-end tunnel leads north. If carefully checked, the dead-end wall is actually a sliding door (A Vision-3 roll to determine this and an IQ-2 roll to figure out how to open it). However, there is a 1 in 6 chance that the door is trapped. Opening it without disarming the trap (requiring separate Traps/TL4 rolls both to find and disarm) causes a stone block to drop from the ceiling and onto anyone within three feet of the door. The traps are quite old and can be avoided with a DX roll (minus encumbrance level). Failure results in the character taking 10d damage (roll on the Falling table for location hit; any damage to the head or torso does not "blow-through").

Beyond the door is a burial chamber very similar to that found in Egyptian pyramids. The body inside the sarcophagus is well-preserved, and can be identified as a Xinos with a Xenology-4 roll or (assuming the PCs' ship has adequate databases) a Research-3 roll. The characters may be very surprised to find various TL9 and 10 items inside, though none of them are usable.

Xinos Ruins on Bernard (Gaard IB)

There is only one structure on the moon, which served as the Xinos' final home. It is large (about 138.23 feet per side), but appears identical to the ones on Reginald. However, there are rungs on the vertical shaft in this one, which leads to an airlock.

On the other side of the airlock is a moderate sized complex, which has not been inhabited for several centuries. If the complex's computer is somehow brought back on-line (a Linguistics-2 roll to figure out the symbols, followed by an Electronics (Computer)-4 roll), the PCs will be able to access the records of the Xinos (see below). If the party is in a Survey or Patrol vessel, they will have a limited database on the Xinos language. Otherwise, the adventurers will have to return to civilization to translate the records.

For the financially-minded adventurer, there is a fair amount of Xinos equipment laying around, most of which can be repaired. However, since the Xino culture was not exceptionally advanced, the equipment has value only as antiques or curios (which may be high anyway!). Note that if the PCs are working for a third party, in most cases the employer is legally the owner of whatever artifacts are found, not the characters . . .

Xinos Ruins on Johnathan (Gaard VI)

Shortly after the Xinos arrived in the system, an automated defense base was set up on one of the moons of the outermost gas giant. The idea was to use it as bait for any pursuing Verm. Some of Johnathan's smaller moons were stripped from their orbits, similarly equipped and then stretched out along the gas giant's orbital path to form a perimeter defense for the system. After several centuries, it became apparent that their enemy was not coming and the bases were abandoned. Their beacons, once meant to attract attention, have not been operational for over 500 years.

Unfortunately for the party, the two principal weapons of each base are functional: an experimental "anti-radiation" beam which causes a ship's power plant to shut off, and a tractor beam (100,000 tons pull to the first weapon's range) to crash the drifting ship into the moon's surface. The pilot of a stricken ship must make a Piloting-4 roll to avoid splitting the hull open. For every point the roll is failed by, assess damage to the ship as if it had taken a hit from a weapon with a firepower equal to 100,000/ship tonnage. If the ship is still operational, the party must make their way into the defense post and shut off its power. There might be a few security robots operational, and perhaps shutting the weapons off trips a self-destruct device . . .

The Natives

The natives of Reginald resemble two foot tall crabs with eight legs and four eyestalks. The pincers are fairly small and are adapted to digging. Their most unusual physical characteristic is a single arm underneath ending in a three fingered hand, used for fine manipulation.

They do not use fire but are able to construct some wooden tools. Their language is fairly simple, consisting of only a few hundred or so words formed by chirps, clicks and pincer movement. They have no name for themselves other than "the people," and live in extensive tunnel systems in groups of 20-100. Rival clans are tolerated, but warfare, though rare, leads to total destruction of the losing clan.

They consider the ziggurats to be sacred ground and will be greatly angered if one is disturbed, surrounding it and making threatening gestures to those responsible. They are not especially brave, however, and will flee if frightened.

In combat they fight with their pincers but will sometimes use a branch as a club. Pincers are PD/DR 2/4 and may parry at half DX.

ST: 7-9 **Move/Dodge:** 6/5 **Size:** 3
DX: 10 **PD/DR:** 1/3 **Weight:** 200-350 lbs.
IQ: 7 **Damage:** 1d+1 cut **Habitat:** Sub
HT: 12/8 **Reach:** C, 1

The Xinos

The Xinos were an advanced race that was destroyed in a series of major wars about 3,000 years ago. The Xinos are not considered a Precursor race, since their technology was not extremely advanced (they were TL10-11 at the time of their extinction) and they had been starfarers for only four or five centuries. However, relics of the Xinos have aided the in the development of technology of humans and others, as well as the detailed histories they kept of other races they discovered adding to the knowledge of this part of the galaxy.

The Xinos were very thin humanoids, almost to the point of being skeletal, and their faces were very triangular. Slightly smaller than a human, a Xino was hairless with off-white skin. They were excellent scholars and explorers but were ill-suited for combat and thus had to rely heavily on technology in war. They were very long-lived, often reaching ages up to 600 years.

They were finally destroyed in a series of wars against the Verm (see *GURPS Aliens,* p.76). The Verm had managed to despoil most of the Xinos colonies as well as wrecking their homeworld. In addition, they used a biological weapon (provided by an unknown race, perhaps the Markaan) that rendered the remaining Xinos sterile. Within 500 years, the race was dead.

A small group made it to the Gaard system and settled on Gaard Ia. However, within a few years the Xinos discovered that there was native intelligent life on the planet. Not wanting to interfere with its development, the Xinos resettled on the moon, but carefully studied the new race (which they named Qusals). While the Xinos stopped burying their dead on Gaard Ia, they left the existing ziggurats in place; this proved to be a mistake. The Xinos were considered gods by the natives and the Xino tombs were treated as holy structures. The last Xino in the Gaard system died some 700 years ago.

At the GM's option, the Xinos might be unknown in the campaign until their ruins in the Gaard system are found. This is a good option if (a) the GM wants to keep the party very busy in the Gaard system or (b) the party isn't the kind who would normally like dealing with proto-sentient giant crabs, and would rather raid tombs.

Beasties

Various non-intelligent creatures inhabit Reginald; three noteworthy land animals are listed below. GMs may find *GURPS Bestiary* and *Space Bestiary* useful for additional creatures. None of these creatures have specific names (for example, the natives refer to the Large Carnivore as "big fast thing with sharp teeth").

Large Carnivore

ST: 50-75 **Move/Dodge:** 11/6 **Size:** 12
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 3/6 **Weight:** 2-3 tons
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 3d imp **Habitat:** jungle, plains
HT: 14/30-50 **Reach:** C, 1, 2

This predator resembles a small to medium-sized allosaurus with natural armor plating. It is not related to dinosaurs, though; it's a mammal. Vision is very poor (Vision 8) but all other senses are very keen (18). It usually attacks from ambush, though it is capable of running down prey.

Small Carnivore

ST: 4-6 **Move/Dodge:** 6/7 **Size:** 1
DX: 14 **PD/DR:** 0/1 **Weight:** 60-90 lbs
IQ: 5 **Damage:** 1d-2 cut **Habitat:** jungle, plains
HT: 13/6 **Reach:** C

Fairly common, it is best described as a sloth with the temperament of a wolverine. Equally at home on ground or in trees, it hunts in packs of 3-5 with larger groups possible. The pack will carefully circle its prey (Stealth-14) and then rush in to attack. Solitary ones drop from trees onto unsuspecting prey (treat as a Contest of the beast's Stealth against the victim's Vision, with success indicating 1d6/2 seconds of surprise).

Small Herbivore

ST: 9-11 **Move:** 14/7 **Size:** 2
DX: 13 **PD/DR:** 0/0 **Weight:** 250-300 lbs
IQ: 4 **Damage:** 1d-3 cr **Habitat:** plains, jungles
HT: 13/9 **Reach:** C

These grazers are about the size of ponies. They have very short necks, dog-like heads and long legs with hooves. The

grazers stampede when frightened, which is easy to cause. They attack by kicking and are found in groups of 12-20.

Adventure Ideas

The nature of the party's adventures in the Gaard system will depend largely on why they're there. Suggestions include:

* The party has been sent in to do a pre-colonization ground study, either for the Survey Service or a mining company. The job includes scouting a proposed colony/mining site on Reginald and the land in a 50-mile radius. The site is located in the grasslands of the largest continent with jungles a few miles to the south. Odd holes about two yards wide (entrances to the native's burrows) are located sparsely on the surface, about two per square mile.

When the party enters the jungle, they discover one of the Xinos' ziggurats and (as they exit it) are then discovered by the natives. Assuming the party tries to talk rather than shoot, some communication may be possible (make the players roleplay this!). Suddenly, a Large Carnivore appears, which scatters the natives. If the adventurers can defeat or drive off the beast, it will evoke a good reaction from the natives.

* The Xinos ruins were discovered by the second survey team. The adventurers are Patrolmen or mercenaries sent to protect the ruins or scientists going through them until the Alliance can decide what to do. A foreign power (or even an Alliance member!) sends in a small team to steal some artifacts for research. While dealing with the terrible weather and odd animal life, and trying to stop the raiders, the native race makes themselves known.

As a twist, the party could be the ones hired to steal the Xinos relics. How well they are equipped depends on who's sending them, but in general their armor and weapons should be slightly inferior to the Patrol's.

* Basically the same as the previous, but it's the natives that are known about, not the ruins.

* The party is given the tedious job of searching each of the moons of the gas giants to see if there are any more Xinos ruins. After several weeks of boredom, they discover a ziggurat on one of the many moons of the outer gas giant. However, just seconds after their discovery, a beam fired from the structure hits their ship and disables their power plant. A few seconds later they are hit by a second beam (a tractor beam) which pulls them to the surface (a Piloting-4 roll is required to avoid crashing).

The engineer manages to get the reactor going again, but a few seconds later the ship is again fired on and the reactor quits again. It should be obvious that the explorers will need to enter the ziggurat and disable the weaponry if they are ever to leave the moon.

Other adventures are possible, such as helping set up a small scientific colony on Reginald (the Alliance will not allow mining on the planet, however, after discovering a developing race on the planet, nor can a regular colony be located on the planet). Or, perhaps, the Verm have finally tracked the Xinos to this system, still ready to make war after so many centuries . . .

by Stephen Kenson

Art by andi jones

The *GURPS* system draws a distinction between magic and psionic abilities. Magic channels the mysterious energy known as mana to achieve certain effects. It involves numerous skills (spells) and rituals and has a very broad range of possible effects, although each spell or ritual is very specific. Psionics calls upon the inner powers of the mind. Psionic abilities are no more difficult than any other act of thought, and psionic skills tend to be broader in scope than spells, but there are fewer of them and significant psi ability is quite expensive. Psi and magic are two different means to the same end.

In a game-world, however, there might not be as clear a distinction between magic and psi. Wizards might use both to perform their amazing feats. They might differentiate magic from psi, like in Mercedes Lackey's *Valdemar* series or Steven Brust's *Jhereg* books, or they might consider them two aspects of the same thing.

It is also possible to have a game-world where "magic" is based entirely on the use of psi. Some occult theorists and parapsychologists claim that magic is nothing more than a misunderstood use of psi cloaked in legend and superstition. Psionic powers can be focused and refined with training in concentration and meditation through the use of magical mantras, gestures and the other trappings traditionally associated with spellcasting. *GURPS Black Ops* takes this view of magic. "Mages" encountered by the Black Ops (like the members of the Lodge) are actually psionics. Katherine Kurtz's *Deryni* novels are a good example of a race of powerful psis who treat their abilities like magic and use them accordingly.

The Psionic Wizard

All psionic "wizards" possess one or more levels in various psionic powers (see pp. B165-176 or *GURPS Psionics*). Minor seers, healers, soothsayers and hedge magicians may have only one or two powers, while true adepts have levels in most if not all psionic powers.

The power levels available depend on the point-level and restrictions of the campaign. A modest level of Power in even one psionic ability can be quite expensive; while a starting mage may spend 25 points on Magery and another 20-30 points on spells, a psionic can easily spend 50 points on a single power! A campaign with powerful psionic wizards will require at least 250 points, if not more. The cost of some psi powers can be reduced using appropriate limitations (see below).

A low-Power psionic wizard can still be quite effective, but is forced to rely on subtlety. Low Power levels are especially appropriate for a "secret" magic campaign, where psionic abilities are hidden and used covertly, as well as a low-fantasy campaign where "magic" is not very powerful.

A psionic wizard's powers can be brought out of latency through long periods of training and initiation, using psycho-metabolic techniques such as meditation, hypnosis, drugs, and altered states of consciousness. Those with latent psi powers are said to have "the Talent" or "the Gift," the potential to become wizards. Occasionally rare individuals develop their Talent spontaneously, usually as a result of some psychic trauma. These individuals often have trouble dealing with their abilities and can be a danger to themselves and others if they are not properly trained.

People with psi powers may be considered specially blessed (or cursed), touched by the gods or spirits. In primitive cultures, psi ability is the mark of a shaman or medicine man. Psis may even be considered a separate race from "normal" humanity, strange and fey, like the aforementioned Deryni.

Individual psi powers and skills may go by different names in the game world, especially in pre-modern cultures. Each psionic power can be considered a separate branch of study, perhaps even an individual "college" of magic. The individuals powers and skills and their likely permutations are discussed below.

Antipsi

Antipsi may be known as shielding, blocking or warding to a psionic wizard. A character with Antipsi cannot normally have any other psionic powers, so antipsis make good "warders" who protect others from magic. Antipsi is also common among skeptics, who point to the fact that psi doesn't seem to work around them as proof that it doesn't exist!

If the GM desires, he can lift the restriction on Antipsi and allow psis to possess it along with other powers. In this case, apprentices are taught to use the Psi Static skill as a means of protecting themselves and others from hostile magicians, and Neutralize is used as a means to rob another magician of his powers.

The Psi Static skill can also create an area that is difficult to penetrate with clairvoyance or astral projection, creating a "ward" that blocks the passage of psychic energy.

Antipsi is very limited at low Power. Neutralize cannot be used if Power is below 5 and Psi Static has a very limited range, requiring the psi to use it on a single target at a time (global range is only about one *inch* at Power 5). Within these limits, a skilled screamer can still quite effectively jam the psi skills of a single target he can see.

At the gamemaster's option, the Neutralize skill might be used to *permanently* remove a character's psionic powers (although it might still be reversible, perhaps using Mindwipe). This technique could be used as a punishment inflicted on wizards who abuse their "gifts" and by evil wizards to destroy the powers of their enemies.

Astral Projection

Also called spirit travel, or the Second Road. Psionic wizards use Astral Projection to travel in spirit form to spy or communicate over great distances as well as see astral forms that might be lurking nearby. Astral Projection can be used as a form of spirit combat, and individuals who lose their body while astral projecting may be the source of legends about ghosts and specters, especially if they have telepathic or psionic vampirism powers as well. A disembodied psi-vamp makes a very effective ghost.

Journeys to the inner astral plane (***GURPS Psionics,*** p. 51) are a common means of introspection and initiation for psionic wizards. Such a journey is virtually required for a neophyte-shaman. The astral plane in the game world might be inhabited by various ghosts, spirits and other psychic entities to challenge wizards, or it may be largely empty, save for astrally projecting wizards themselves.

The astral form of a psi with low Astral Projection Power tends to be slow (low Speed) and cannot project as long, but skilled astral projectors can still remain outside their bodies for some time. Astral sight remains quite useful despite its

more limited range.

Related to astral projection is the Dream Travel power from *GURPS CthulhuPunk.* Psionic wizards might interact with each other in a dream world of some kind, not unlike the inner astral plane. Of course, there may also be various creatures that live in the dreamlands as potential allies or enemies of wizards.

Electrokinesis

Electrokinesis is poorly understood in preindustrial cultures, since there is no real theory of electricity or electromagnetism. Most Electrokinetic skills are not very useful until electricity comes into widespread use.

Confuse can stun opponents and disrupt another psi's concentration. Confuse has a limited range and duration at low Power but is still quite effective. The Lightning skill (coupled with Energy Sense) can direct discharges during thunderstorms to attack certain targets (although the wizard wouldn't be able to *summon* thunderstorms). Energy Shield can protect against such lightning attacks as well as natural lightning strikes. Energy Sense provides the ability to sense magnetic north and provides a +3 to Navigation skill, keeping a wizard from getting lost.

Photokinesis can create illusions or render the user invisible, although telepathic invisibility via Illusion will probably be far more common (see below). Photokinesis needs Power 3 to produce an image 1 hex in size, up to 9 hexes away, a very useful ability for a low-Power electrokinetic. A low power photokinetic can only blur his image, not become invisible (which requires Power 10+). Since photokinetic constructs shed light, they can also be used to create globes of cold "flames" that shed light, like the "handfire" of the Deryni.

In a modern or futuristic setting, Electrokinesis becomes much more effective, allowing psi wizards to control and influence electrical devices of all kinds. Dampen can shut down many types of machines (including computers and robots), Surge can cause overloads as a "poltergeist" effect, and, with Cyberpsi, "net wizards" can hack computer systems using only the power of their minds! (see Joan Vinge's *Catspaw* for an excellent example of this application of psi).

Cyberpsi requires greater Computer Programming skills to use it effectively at low Power. Most low-power cyberpsis prefer to touch their subject, gaining a +2 bonus to skill, rather than relying on their limited range.

ESP

ESP is commonly referred to as "the Sight" or "Second Sight" by psionic wizards, and it is one of the most common psi abilities (along with Telepathy). In a psi-wizards campaign, anyone with Danger Sense has ESP Power 5. People with ESP are regarded as seers, mediums, sensitives and visionaries. Many consider it a primary ability for becoming a wizard, although many people may have ESP as their sole psionic ability. Skilled users of Clairvoyance, Psychometry, and Precognition can gain a reputation as soothsayers and fortunetellers. Many (if not all) seers may have a Limitation on their ESP skills, requiring them to use of some kind of focus such as a crystal ball, mirror or deck of tarot cards to gain a clear "vision." Some wizards only have visions while in deep trances.

Clairsentient abilities can be used for scrying and information-gathering. Low-Power clairvoyants have very limited range, a matter of inches. Enough to see inside envelopes, closed drawers or the like, but not much else. Long-distance seers use Astral Projection rather than ESP. Combat Sense is useless without at least Power 10, unlikely in a low-Power game. Precog limits on range make the ability weak in terms of range and time at low-power. Psychometry, however, can be quite effective at low Power, except with regard to very distant events.

Healing

Healing is a highly prized ability in low-tech settings and even in high-tech ones. In a fantasy campaign, psionic healers are probably the pinnacle of medical "technology." Healers tend to combine their psionic powers with practical skills such as Physician and Diagnosis, along with a knowledge of herbal remedies. In a more technologically-

advanced setting, psionic healing is a formidable a complement for other forms of medical treatment. The campaign world may feature a prominent "order" of healers, such as the Healers from the *Deryni* books.

Metabolism Control is a basic ability for any healer, as instructors begin by teaching a student how to understand and control his own body. A knowledge of biology and anatomy can allow psychokinetic healers to do considerable damage if they chose to use their psionic abilities aggressively (p. P35), but professional healers most likely take oaths not to use their abilities to cause harm (a Vow and/or Pacifism).

Sense Aura is also be a basic healing skill, allowing the wizard to read a patient's emotional state and providing information on the subject's state of health.

Wizards may use Life Extension to lend truth to stories about wizards being immortal or having very long life spans. This can create awe and no small amount of jealousy on the part of normal people and could lead to very old and powerful wizards who accumulate skill and power over the centuries. Perhaps legends of liches and similar "undead" began this way.

Psychic Vampirism

Psychic Vampirism can form the basis of vampire legends, as well as necromancers who use magic to steal the vitality of others. Perhaps vampires are not undead at all, but powerful psis using Psionic Vampirism to steal life from others and extend their own lives.

The Steal Power skill can also be used somewhat more humanely as a means for several wizards to freely give some of their power to another for a particularly difficult psionic feat. In this case, a successful Steal Power roll is all that is required, the subject does not resist. Less scrupulous magicians can, of course, still use unwilling subjects for this purpose. If everyone is latently psionic (p. P102), then even normal people can be drained for 1 point of Power each!

Psychokinesis

Psychokinesis (aka "fetching" or "shaping") is the "workhorse" power of the psionic wizard, used to perform virtually all physical feats of magic, from levitation to spontaneous combustion. Telekinesis is used to move objects, deflect attacks and strike at foes, allowing a wizard to do things like crushing a victim's heart or choking them from a distance. Using a focus like a voodoo doll to obtain a Telescan "lock," a psionic wizard can even inflict harm on a target from afar. Levitation allows a wizard to fly, and PK Shield can deflect many physical attacks (especially in a low-tech campaign, where a little DR goes a long way). Wizards can also use Telekinesis to deflect missile attacks like arrows and thrown weapons.

Some of these abilities may be considered the work of invisible spirits, leading to legends of magicians with numerous spirit helpers to carry out their will.

A powerful psychokinetic wizard can be a terror in combat. A low-Power psychokinetic has some strong limitations. Cryokinesis and Pyrokinesis require considerable time and patience to be effective. They are virtually useless in combat. Levitation needs Power 5+ to work on an average human adult, and even then is slow. PK shield provides some protection at low levels, but not enough to deflect most weapons. Telekinesis can move only very limited weights, but is still capable of great precision with sufficient skill. Direct TK attacks (p. P35) are still quite effective if the telekinetic pinches off a blood vessel or the trachea.

Telepathy

Telepathy allows psionic wizards to perform all the classical feats of mental magic: mind reading, charms, illusions, mental suggestion, and psychic attack. Most "wizards duels" are in fact mental struggles of telepathy or combats carried out on the astral plane; or even both, with astrally projecting adepts using psychic "weapons" against the Mind Shields of their opponents.

Mind Shield is a wizards first-line defense against most hostile magic. Apprentices are always taught the Mind Shield skill if they are able to learn it at all (psionic wizards should probably be allowed to purchase Mind Shield as a single-skill Power). Powerful wizards are able to extend their psychic shields to protect others near them (p. P38).

Psionic "signatures" will be used to trace the work of particular wizards, and individuals with Signature Sniffer and Psi Sense skills may be employed as "witch smellers," either to find potential candidates for training or to hunt down anyone with the Talent for the Inquisition!

Low-Power sharply limits the range of telepathic skills. Aspect is quite useless at low-Power. Mental Blows of low-Power can stun, but cause no real damage. Mental Stab needs a Power of at least 5. Mind Shield is less effective at low-Power, but a high skill still makes the shield quite useful. Other telepathic skills are limited almost solely by range -- skill is more important than power for abilities like Telereceive, Illusion and Telecontrol.

Teleportation

Teleportation gives psionic wizards the ability to appear and disappear at will, perhaps in clouds of smoke or sparks, as well as "walk through walls" at low Power and escape from various forms of bindings and traps. They can use Exo-Teleport to make items, creatures and even people (if they have sufficient Power) appear or vanish out of thin air, useful for conjuring tricks as well as "banishings." Some or all wizards might even have the World Jumper advantage (see *GURPS Time Travel*) and be able to travel to alternate dimensions or times.

Teleport is a weak ability at low-Power, which greatly limits its range. Combat Teleport requires Power 10 and Exo-Teleport is quite weak at low levels, able to move less than an ounce. Low-power Auto-Teleport can still allow a teleporter to "walk through walls" or escape "impossible" traps in the manner of Houdini.

Rituals

Psionic wizards still use the ritual trappings of traditional magic, as a framework for focusing and intensifying their innate psionic abilities. Wizards may have Limitations like Preparation Required on some or all of their psi abilities to reflect the elaborate rituals needed to activate the ability. This is especially true of many ESP abilities (especially Precognition) which are not usually performed on the spur of the moment.

A ritual circle of telepathic wizards can form a psychic gestalt to increase their power (p. P37). This would requires all the wizards to enter into telepathic rapport, and each must have the ability to be augmented in order to add to the power of the gestalt. A large enough circle of wizards could extend their power over a great distance and perform massive feats beyond the ability of any of the individual members.

Foci

Magical items in a psionic wizardry campaign are exceedingly rare, because magic does not reside in objects, it exists solely as a product of the human mind. This limits magical power primarily to wizards.

Wizards might use items to focus their concentration and improve their own abilities. Such an item is called a focus. A focus has no power of its own, but because of its form, or something inherent in its structure, a focus improves and strengthens the wizard's concentration. The most common foci are crystals, which are believed to amplify psionic energy. Examples include the shiral crystals from the *Deryni* books and the "mage stones" used by mages in Valdemar.

A focus usually provides a boost to the user's Power. An example of this is given for the crystals used by the Disciples of Change (**GURPS Religion,** p.151): each 10 carats of flawless crystal adds +1 to one Power if the user is in contact with the crystal and makes a successful Meditation roll. If crystals are useful as psionic amplifiers, it explains the tendency for fortunetellers to use crystal balls and the craze for crystals in the New Age movement.

Potions

Even primitive psionic wizards may discover and use plants and herbs that have natural psi-enhancing properties, similar to Brainstorm, Mind Hype, or even Blue Fire from **GURPS Psionics** (p. P78-79). Enhancing drugs can be used to bring out latent powers or simply enhance weaker power levels for wizards attempting more powerful effects. Likewise, those seeking to restrain those with psionic powers may discover a natural extract that functions like Shatter or Monobloc (p. P79-80). The anti-Deryni drug merasha is one example.

Familiars

Another potential focus for a psionic wizard is some kind of catalyst creature (p. P54). Certain animal pets or companions might a psi's inherent powers while they are present, others might have a tendency to bring out latent abilities in their masters. Catalyst creatures can take the form of familiars, and might be attributed greater powers than they truly have, considered to be spirits or demons in animal form.

There is also the possibility of non-human psionic wizards in the campaign world. If a fantasy world includes races like orcs, elves and dwarves, they may all have psionics powers of their own. Perhaps some races are inherently better at certain powers than others: elves are excellent empaths, while dwarves are stolidly anti-psionic (or have high levels of Psionic Resistance).

Other psionic creatures and "monsters" may exist. For example, dragons may have evolved from psionic dinosaurs that learned the use their inborn psi powers to survive the extinction of their cousins and evolve greater intelligence. A dragon wizard might possesses tremendous psionic power, using pyrokinesis to "breathe fire," levitation to fly in defiance of the Laws of Aerodynamics and life extension to live for hundreds or even thousands of years. Other creatures may possess natural psi abilities they use to stalk and capture prey, or for defense. Creatures may also have Psionic Resistance, making them difficult for psionic wizards to deal with.

Ghosts And Spirits

A psionic wizardry world can also feature beings of pure psionic energy, like a Being of Pure Thought or an astral entity. Some may be psis whose bodies died but whose minds lived on, creating "ghosts" (like the ghosts from *GURPS Black Ops*). Other entities may come from elsewhere on the astral plane, perhaps even from the mysterious "inner" plane (or the Collective Unconscious).

Immune to physical harm, these spirits can only be dealt with using psionic abilities like Telepathy and Psychic Vampirism. Anitpsi can also keep them at bay.

Psychic Magic Campaigns

In a psionic wizardry campaign, magic becomes a somewhat less "mechanical" force than it is in some fantasy campaign worlds. Wizards must rely entirely on their inner abilities and resources. Magic items are extremely rare and generally not useful for non-wizards. This means psionic wizards can become very powerful relative to other characters in the campaign, especially in a low-tech fantasy world. In such a setting, gamemasters may wish to impose an Unusual Background cost for psionic powers. Very high power levels (10+) in a specific psi power might also call for an Unusual Background, unless the campaign has characters built on 200 or more points.

Psionic wizardry can also add an element of fantasy to a modern or futuristic setting. Characters in a *GURPS Space* campaign can encounter a primitive world where the inhabitants have refined their native psi talents into a complex system of magical rituals, and many of the local life-forms have "magical" abilities. Is it "real" magic or just an application of psi? Keep the players guessing.

Cars for 2050

by James Hintz

Art by [andi jones](#)

The Long Shot

Tired of getting knocked out in the first three seconds of a Division 20 duel? Then drive the Long Shot!

It's not big, pretty, or heavily armed, but it carries more armor than Fort Knox. Laugh at the stunned faces of your opponents as your composite armor shrugs off the heaviest weapons fire. Let patience be your crew chief as your opponent empties his big guns. Then swoop in for the kill with your turreted shotgun, triple loaded with ammo.

Strength, endurance, longevity; When you can't outgun the opposition, outlast them. The Longshot from Whirling Duelist Motors.

The Longshot: Compact, x-hvy chassis, heavy suspension, large power plant w/PC and SC, four PR radial tires, driver, vehicular shotgun in turret, two extra VS magazines, five flame cloud dischargers; 2 left , 2 right, 1 back, all linked together w/ link to turret, hi-res single weapon computer, no paint windshields, heavy duty anti-lock braking system. Metal Composite Armor: F12/30, R5/27, L5/27, B5/27, T12/30, U1/5. Four 10 pt. wheel hubs, four fake wheel guards. Acceleration 10, Top Speed 123, HC 4, 4,440 lbs, $19,856.

The Tsunami Warrior

Drive the duelling sensation for the 2050 season, The Tsunami Warrior.

Experience the power of the elements with the Warrior's incendiary rockets and heavy composite metal armor. Your Division 20 opponents will know you have mastered the waves with one look at the new HoloBlue (tm) paint job. Duel with the forces of nature at your side. The Tsunami Warrior from Fuji Motors.

The Tsunami Warrior: Sedan, ex-hvy chassis, hvy suspension, super power plant w/SC, 4 HD radial tires, Driver, Micro-Missile Launcher in turret w/mag and 20 shots incendiary ammo. Micro Missile Launcher left side linked to turret. Spear 1000 mine dropper w/ mag and 9 shots spider mine ammo. 2 oil dischargers,1 left,1 right, hi-res single weapon computer. Sloped laser reflective metal composite armor: F5/23, R4/20, L4/20, B4/24, T6/25, U1/5. 4 Composite wheel hubs 1/5, 2 composite wheel guards back 1/5. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 115, HC 4, 6,120 lbs. $19,995.

The Bullseye III

Atlantic Industries presents The Bullseye

III, redesigned for 2050. Arena ready for
Divisions 10, 20, and 30.

Only the Bullseye III has the twin laser
guided rockets that will knock out your
opponents in one shot. Drive the Bullseye
and drive to the winners circle in style.

Div. 30 Bullseye III: Luxury, x-hvy chassis,
heavy suspension, large power plant, four-
steel belted solid tires, driver, twin linked
laser guided armor piercing heavy rockets
in turret, targeting laser in turret, laser guidance link, recoiless rifle w/HEAT ammo bumper triggered back, hi-res
targeting computer, heavy duty shock absorbers, heavy duty anti-lock brakes. Sloped armor: F45, R32, L32, B35, T30,
U5. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 90, HC 3 6,595 lbs, $29,919.

Div. 20 Bullseye III: Sedan, x-hvy chassis, heavy suspension, large power plant w/PC, Four PR radial tires, driver,
twin linked guided armor piercing medium rockets in turret, two 3-shot rocket magazines fed into turret. targeting laser
in turret, laser guidance link, machine gun w/HD ammo bumper triggered back, targeting computer, Armor: F45, R45,
L45, B45, T20, U4. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 90,HC 4, 6,116 lbs, $19,402.

Div. 10 Bullseye III: Midsize, Lt chassis, Lt suspension, medium power plant w/PC and SC, 4 standard tires, driver,
twin linked laser guided armor piercing light rockets in turret, two 1sp rocket magazines fed into turret, targeting laser
in turret, laser guidance link, junk dropper w/mag linked to turret and BT back, light flamethrower w/mag linked to JD
and BT back. Armor: F15, R15, L15, B15, T15, U5. 4 10-pt wheel hubs. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 97.5, HC 1, 4,315
lbs, $9,880.

Div. 15 upgrade: Remove junkdropper w/ mag, two 1sp RM, 2 links , and one bumper trigger. Add Two 2 sp rocket
magazines, 2 pair LGAPLtR's, HRSWC, HD brakes, 1 paint discharger, upgrade FT ammo to high temp, and add 10
points of armor. 4,320 lbs, $14,980.

The Guide To Munchkins: The Truth

by James "Grim" Desborough & Steve Mortimer

Art by Kent Burles

Scene: A darkened room. Two spotlights come on, each picking out a single figure seated on a wooden chair. The first is a hulking, cuddly, Sumo-wrestler type with a worrying fire in his eyes. The second is a long-haired, painfully thin, bearded, arty type. They look remarkably unworried. A voice starts asking questions from the darkness . . .

Why did you write the guide to munchkins?

Grim: It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Steve: It's our only contract and I'm a qualified expert on the subject.

Grim: It was a joke to start with, but Mr. Jackson seemed to like it. Who are we to argue if it means we get a break in the industry? Nothing quite like it has been done before except in a small way in roleplaying magazines. We thought it was time that roleplayers had some humor of their own.

Steve: It's just one of those things you do when you're drunk; collect traffic cones, tell everybody you love them, and write huge books!

What sort of decisions did you have to make when writing the book?

Steve: Did we actually make any decisions?

Grim: Yes. We did.

Steve: What?

Grim: How much to write each week, what to cut, what to keep, what was funny and whether to get up before midday.

Steve: Oh yeah, I remember those decisions.

Grim: We had to decide what we could legitimately satirize in a book with this specific title. Most of it concentrates on power-gamers, but we also have a dig at the big companies and a lot of other stuff as well.

Steve: And some of our friends.

Grim: And Goths.

Steve: But you are a Goth.

Grim: Gothish.

Steve: And *Friends* the TV show.

Grim: And pop music, the Spice Girls in particular. We'd have had a go at a lot more but the book would have been 600 sheets of microfilm and would have been called *Grim and Steve Rant On For Several Weeks*. We had to be strict about what we wrote, and stop it drifting.

Where did you get your source material?

Grim: Friends, players, the Internet, bad dreams . . .

Steve: Personal experience.

Grim: Yeah, Steve is a munchkin himself. I'm a poor put-upon GM, I have to put up with this kind of crap all the time. I wrote most of the detailed stuff about thwarting munchkins.

Steve: And I wrote all the stuff about screwing over your GM.

Grim: I want to make it absolutely clear that he said screwing over your GM.

Steve: We don't want you to think we're a minority or anything, then you won't buy the book.

Grim: I don't know, there's something rather butch about munchkins. Don't you find all that fascination with guns a bit suspect?

Steve (Indignant tone): No, not at all. There's naught wrong with a big gun.

Grim (Sigh): The rest of the material comes from our imaginations. We filled in the gaps with observations and ideas on the industry as a whole.

Steve: Just think of us as observers, documenting munchkins whenever possible. It's all to do with karmic balance. All the pretentious people are always complaining about how bad power-gaming is. We thought we'd restore the balance by telling the munchkins' side of the story.

Was there anything you missed out?

Grim: We had to cut our list of real life and fictional munchkins, but then it wasn't funny. No great loss there.

Steve: We had to cut back on some of the swearing and some of the more libelous comments. We don't want you to get the wrong idea, we're not the kind of people who swear just for the sake of it. We're nice boys really. *(Evil grin.)*

Grim: Uh, yeah. We didn't entirely cut the swearing, but our "*" key saw a lot of use. Well, munchkins are shallow enough to think swearing is funny in and of itself, so why not?

Steve: OK, so maybe we're not that nice. I suppose I do listen to Cradle Of Filth.

Grim: We tried not to censor ourselves or cut anything out. We wanted this to be a true representation of what

roleplaying is. A hobby for dirty-minded adolescents who like guns and cars.

Steve: And chicks.

Grim: Liar. We didn't ignore women. We didn't really miss out anything. Pretty much everything we wanted to say that's relevant is in there.

Do you have any plans for any other books?

Steve: I don't know, it depends if anyone else takes us on.

Grim: Since we've insulted all the major games companies in the book I think we're f***ed. Damn, that means we'll have to get day jobs.

Steve: And lives, and normal sleep patterns.

Grim (Shudder): Seriously though, we'd like to work on something that isn't humorous. I'm afraid of getting pigeonholed as a "comedy roleplayer," and **Paranoia** is the only game that was ever really funny. Oh, and **Toon!** of course, Mr. Jackson, sir.

Steve: And there's **GURPS Goblins**. And our editor worked on **GURPS Discworld**...

Grim: Okay, I'm sure that's enough creeping to the publisher.

Steve: On another serious note, we'd like to work on some of the really destructive games.

Grim: Or just see some of our other ideas in print. We'd like to convert a few science-fiction books into roleplaying games if we ever get the opportunity.

Do you have any suggestions on how to use the book?

Grim: Yeah, you can prop up wobbly tables with it. You could hit someone with it, I suppose.

Steve: Or you could build a little shrine, put it on its own pedestal and give it offerings of Marlboro and single malt whisky.

Grim: Really though, you'll find aspects of your characters and players in there. Its a good thing to read as a group. Just try not to wet yourselves.

Steve: Yeah, you could even use it for its intended purpose and turn your characters into utter munchkins.

Grim: Or alternatively you could use it to scupper anyone trying any power-gamer tricks in your game.

Steve: One technique we didn't include in the book was that if everything in there fails, you can beat your GM soundly round the head with it until he submits.

Grim: To tell the truth it has no actual intrinsic value as far as anyone's game is concerned, but its still a good laugh. Buy it, damn you.

by Aidan Delgado

Art by [andi jones](#)

Roleplaying is a fine balance between the performance of an actor and the narration of a storyteller. For a game to be fluid and exciting, a game master must combine an elegantly crafted plot with a convincing performance to actually bring the characters to life. For many players and GMs, the performance inherent in a typical roleplaying game is the weak link: many players would find it easier to write their characters' actions and dialogue rather than speak it. If players could be freed from their self-consciousness and inhibitions about playing their roles, the game could be elevated to the level of classic fantasy literature. For those who find their heads filled with powerful and thrilling words but are too inhibited to say them aloud, the style of Chronicle narration may be just the thing to set you free.

The essence of Chronicle roleplaying is that the GM is the only speaker and reads written statements from the PCs that determine their characters' actions. In this way, the story of the game is given a single narrator that makes the story flow more easily and without awkward pauses. At the end of any game session, the GM should have what amounts to a written transcript of the PCs adventure, all narrated by the single voice of the GM. The strength of this system is that it frees the players and GM from having to perform; they can concentrate on creating an epic story without having to place their own acting talents on the line.

To begin running a Chronicle narrative, you should first gather a large supply of 3x5 index cards and pens. These will be used for easy transport and organization of notes during the game. The typical order of play in a Chronicle narration is as follows:

1) The GM reads aloud the setting for the current scene. Meanwhile, the players write out on pieces of paper the actions that their PCs will take.
2) While the players write out their actions, the GM makes note of the actions of any NPCs or monsters.
3) The GM collects the papers and puts them in chronological order, adding perhaps a word or two to link the passages together.
4) The GM also writes out a description of any events that are happening in the setting independent of the party.
5) The GM then reads out the actions of each character, inserting any NPC actions in the order that they occur. While the GM reads this new narrative, the players write out any actions that their characters will take in response, and the process begins anew.

Before play begins, the players and GM should agree on a verb tense to use when writing out their actions. It is very disrupting to have one or more characters using past tense when the GM is narrating in present tense; it fragments the story and forces the GM to make corrections on the fly, slowing the game to a snail's pace. Likewise, all players should agree on the type of language to be used; if most of the players are using Old English words like "thee" and "thou" then the whole narrative should be in this style. An example of a player's note could be: "Sensing the approaching guards, Keoland leapt back; flattening his body against the wall and trying to blend with the flickering

shadows that played across it." The player would indicate on his/her note that the thief PC was attempting to Hide in Shadows, and the GM would place it according to initiative order if in combat or according to chronological order if outside of combat. How long would it take to write out this short sentence and slip it to the GM? Thirty seconds? How many players habitually use this level of detail when describing their PC's actions? Comparing the above statement to the phrase "I'll try to Hide in Shadows," which sounds more like fantasy literature? This follows the established literary principle of show-not-tell; the game becomes much more vivid when players figure out actions through descriptions rather than having them bluntly stated. The actions of the character blend with the GM's narration rather than being an interruption to the GM as in usual gaming. The Chronicle style of narration lets your players have more dramatic license in stating their character's actions, but it frees them from the self-consciousness of having to verbally act out those dramatic words.

The key consideration during a Chronicle gaming session is to keep the adventure fast-paced. Writing out actions is so much slower than speaking them that players may lose interest or grow bored if the GM takes too long to process each player's actions. To contend with this, the GM and players should use as much "overlap" in writing as possible. The players should not wait for the GM to finish speaking before they start writing, the players should begin recording their character's actions during the GM's narration to speed play. If the actions are already thought out, writing them down should be very brief. Similarly, the GM should use every moment that the players spend writing to plan out any NPC actions. The players will not notice the extra time spent on actions if the narrative is really thrilling and detailed. It may be helpful to use an egg timer or stopwatch to keep the writing period short and sweet. You will be amazed at how much you can write in one minute, and how much detail you can give to a player's actions with a single minute to write. More importantly, a minute should be a short enough time to keep the adventure flowing at a steady pace and leave plenty of room for dice-rolling and other bookkeeping. If your group is large enough, you might consider using an assistant GM to help play the part of NPCs and villains. It lightens the GM's load considerably if he has a helper who plans and writes for the major NPCs in a scene. The assistant GM scenario can speed up play considerably if you can spare the player.

During combat, it is especially important to overlap player writing time with GM time. It may be best in combat situations for the GM and players to spend a minute or two writing out all their actions before any narration takes place. Interestingly, using the Chronicle system actually makes combat more surprising and spontaneous because the GM cannot have the enemies adapt their tactics to the PCs' moves. The GM and PCs must agree upon their actions beforehand, reveal them all at once and let the dice fall where they may. The GM will have no idea what the players are going to try, and therefore the monsters will also be "surprised" by the PC's actions. If players want to take a minute to confer strategy, let them write out their character's discussion. This serves the dual purpose of giving the GM more time to write, and forcing the players to carry out discussions "in-character." Players often discuss topics without actually roleplaying their characters discussing it -- the players talk and the characters just mutely follow the agreed strategy. With the Chronicle method it is especially important to keep all conversation in the written narrative, that way the story will flow in a logical way as all actions will be recorded and justified.

Further, a GM using this style has to put his/her trust in the players to provide the meat of the story. A GM doesn't have time to put in ample descriptions of each player's actions with this method; the players must paint a picture of what their character is doing and how they are doing it. In the beginning, players may be cautious to take the lead in the storytelling. After a few sessions, you will probably find that your players enjoy having direct control over the narrative and will develop detailed character statements. In a pinch, the GM can always embellish a player's note, adding plenty of detail to a sparse statement. There is usually plenty of time for the GM to insert moderate description, but with planning the adventure and writing out NPC actions, it is up to the players to carry the weight of the narration. This places the focus of the story where it belongs: on the players. Players will enjoy having the chance to state their character's actions exactly as they envisioned them, customizing the narrative to suit their own creative vision.

Once you and the players get the hang of this type of storytelling, you are free to do many things that would be impossible in a typical style. One benefit of this method is that if you forbid the players to discuss their characters before the game begins, the players will not know which player is representing which character. This makes the

players address their comments to other characters rather than the controlling player, speaking to the puppet rather than the puppet-master, so to speak. This subtle change will cause your players to relate to each character as an individual because it will be impossible to tell who is running the PC. You will find that players will have more detailed discussions when they are forced to do all planning and strategizing in written form among their characters. Another upshot of this technique is that the players will not be able to tell NPCs from player characters. The GM could insert detailed comments from an NPC and have the players relating to that character as if it were player-controlled! Clearly, this opens up some exciting possibilities for roleplaying when NPCs become as valued as player characters. Imagine the party desperately trying to save an NPC henchman, because each player thinks the henchman is another player! A PC could be shocked to discover that the servant he always talked down to was, in fact, another player. With Chronicle narration the line between GM-controlled characters and player characters is blurred. Because all interaction takes place in the same forum, NPC voices carry as much weight as PC voices, as there is no difference in their presentation.

In the long run you will find that Chronicle gaming yields another benefit: a complete record of all game sessions. At the end of each adventure you will have a stack of note cards that tell a story very similar to a novel. Who knows? With a little polish you could even turn your gaming sessions into fantasy short stories. In addition, it is a great tool for a GM to have every event and NPC recorded. With a written chronicle of each adventure, you can keep all the names, dates, and events in your game in order. If your group should happen to adopt a new player, it will be easy for that player to get acquainted with the current campaign by simply reading through the records of the party's adventures.

The challenge of the Chronicle system is to keep the story going without getting bogged down in the mundane chore of collecting and organizing notes. If the players shoulder the main task of describing their actions and the GM only places the notes in order, hastily adding a few connective words, you can keep the adventure running at a speed comparable with verbal gaming. Remember: the GM must be extremely succinct when adding to the player notes and get right to the business of reading out the players' statements. You can hold the players' interest if you are quick to read out their statements and allow them to act without too much delay.

It has always been easier for some to write something and deliver it indirectly than to speak personally. There is something very fulfilling about taking part in a fantasy novel, and with Chronicle narration you will find that your games take on the dimensions of sword & sorcery fiction. If you can get this type of game up and running you will find it much easier to take that extra step in drama and language that turns your game into an epic.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

I'm Crazy For Boy Crazy!

After taking a look at http://www.boycrazy.com/, the promotional web site for Decipher's newest collectible card game, I've become ***Boy Crazy!*** Having a possible 363 cards depicting cute boys between ages 12 to 22, sold in packs of 9, I have to admit -- shamefacedly -- that I am driven to collect them all. With pictures of cute, wide-eyed boys and vital statistics such as astrological signs and preferred type of beet, a hard-core gaming collector just can't pass up this game. I have to buy them off the net quickly, since they're going fast and I heard the kid with Down's Syndrome is going to be worth something on eBay.

Decipher, Inc. has already revealed they're working on expansion packs for ***Boy Crazy!***, and I can hardly wait. Hopefully, they're going to be adding action cards to make the game more interesting while teaching valuable lessons. There will be those depressingly common and low-powered Lying and Cheating cards. There will the powerful Marathon Phone Call card, which conveys all the boy information the girls will ever need to know, and played with Lying it becomes a dangerous device. And then there's going to be the Backstabbing card, so we can learn the power of betrayal early on -- but it's a rare, so we have to buy lots and lots of boys before we can start backstabbing our friends.

Maybe, if Decipher has a sharp marketing team, they can buddy up to Wizards of the Coast and start selling ***Pokémon Crazy!*** cards. There's something disturbing and attractive about unleashing Ricky Martin-esque teenage bohunks out of Pokémon balls to fight random members of 'N Sync in a stadium, using the power of a Pelvic Thrust card to break the empty career of the enemy. Beware the girl who happens to be wielding such dangerously rare cards as "Can Sing," "Can Play An Instrument," or "Isn't Shallow and Pointless." She's dangerous.

Decipher president Cindy Thornburg said, "Every heterosexual girl goes through a stage of development where she becomes aware of boys." Does this mean they're releasing a lesbian expansion for those girls who discover in their development that they're gay? "***Girl Crazy!*** The collectible card game for girls discovering their emerging interest in girls!" We can't *discriminate* here!

I am proud that Decipher has decided to use sex to introduce girls to the wonders of roleplaying games, and are using gaming as a tool to teach young girls (ages 10 and up) that the opposite sex is just an object, all that matters is what you look like, and a girl's role in life is to get a boyfriend. What a wonderful use of the teaching tool. I hope they introduce this into schools. I can't wait until April when ***Boy Crazy!*** is released in stores everywhere.

Fetch Daddy's blue fright wig. I must be handsome when I unleash my rage.

Another Objectified Marketing Scheme

For reasons that I can't quite comprehend, gaming companies like Decipher, Inc. realize they need the female quotient to prop up their bottom lines, but they make the blatant assumption that girls are *dumb*. And not normally dumb, but dumb as posts. Clearly, in their estimation, all girls think that math is hard, so they should go shopping. Why not tap into that gauzy pink, air headed mentality and make a mint on it at malls everywhere?

Has the crew over at Decipher, Inc. spent so much time hanging around at *Star Trek* conventions doling out cards sporting Ferengi that they've lost touch? Or are they so afraid of the juggernaut that is Hasbro-supported Wizards of the Coast that they're willing to bend to the lowest common denominator? What's next on the desperation and exploitation train? Porn collectible card games? Should they be appealing to that yet untouched 18-25 year old market? (Well, other than ***XXXenophile,*** of course -- we're talking about full 256-color with pendulating breasts and the word "nipple" written on the card somewhere.)

It's appalling and insulting. It's crass commercialism in its purest incarnation, pandering to a mindless TV-raised generation who assume girls can't think past their own puberty-induced hormones. Just imagine if warm, fuzzy, and family fun Decipher had bought FASA. We'd be having cybered, pink mini-skirt wearing trolls toting Uzis yelling

about Girl Power, and reminders in new prints of *Virtual Realities* that hacking is "bad." If this is the future of gaming, I'm glad I play electric guitar.

Girls aren't dumb, and those who are buying and playing games aren't going to be suckered in by cards with boys of the names of Brandon, Mitch and Chris, even at an age as young as 10 or 11. They're looking for more substance, not less. Girls playing roleplaying games aren't Barbies with perfect breasts and heroin induced waistlines, whose focus in life is buying another bag of bath salts -- and they know it. Those girls are smart, disturbingly creative, and proud. When did the game companies forget this? Maybe they never realized it in the first place, and thus, the market stays untapped.

It Came From The Bookshelf

Some of the gaming companies didn't completely miss the point, and for that, there are real chick gamers. There are better things for a girl's imagination than collectible card games with pictures of boys whoring themselves for attention, and a good gamer usually has them in his home. The common gamer has entire bookshelves filled with games.

Put away copies of *Boy Crazy!* and their ilk. Sit kids, girlfriends, wives, or anyone in grabbing range down to play. It's worth the time spent, and they usually foster memorable first-time gaming experiences. The following games are merely suggestions or guidelines of what to pull off the shelf while burning *Boy Crazy!* in effigy. They were not chosen in any scientific, or sane, manner. Many were chosen on the merits of their cover art alone. It's all entirely subjective, possibly wrong, and may be harmful if eaten.

Vampire: The Masquerade. With the darkness of night, beauty, angst, death, and spiffy powers, *Vampire* is the most female friendly of all the roleplaying games made today. *Vampire's* primary focus on character development, politics, and roleplaying over treasure hunting and monster killing was revolutionary when it came out, and has spawned legions of followers in both tabletop and LARP form -- not to mention the spin-off games and the mountains of supplementary material.

Amber Diceless Role-Playing Game. War, sex, politics, and family -- this is either an episode of *The Sopranos* or *Amber Diceless.* Based on the books by Roger Zelazny, it's an intense soap opera of a game, complete with strong female role models and powers spanning an entire universe. The game works on a bare framework of a system, and it involves storytelling from every member of the game, not just the game master. It is also open to infinite variants -- including the one where Corwin is really a millionaire snack food magnate with a grudge against Frito-Lay.

Advanced Dungeons and Dragons 2nd Edition. The system is quirky and the game is a little outdated, but *AD&D* is still the king of roleplaying. It smacks of familiarity, complete with dwarves, elves, and dragons, and it can be played in the old "kill the foozle at the end of the dungeon" way, or with world-spanning games of high-stakes politics, or everything in between. Heaps of modules lay ready for almost instant play. Familiar, comfortable, and fun -- like an old pair of underwear, but not.

Big Eyes Small Mouth. The system takes five minutes to learn. Simple, balanced, and *fun,* this game is a must for anyone who enjoys anime or cartoons. It's flexible enough to cover everything from *Akira* to the *Powerpuff Girls,* easy enough to learn the first time playing, and enjoyable enough to come back for more. And it only costs $15.95 for the entire game.

Star Wars. Who *doesn't* want to fight their way through Stormtroopers while wielding the Force like a large, blunt object? Or making the Kessel run in less than 12 parsecs? The *Star Wars* universe is almost an institution, and the West End Games *D6 System* makes it easy to fight the Empire. Again, the books are going depressingly out of print, but the auction sites foster a lively RPG barter business.

Everway. On the side of the box, under the label of "Visionary Role-playing", is the line: *For ages 13 and up*. *Everway* is one of those rare games where parents who roleplay can, and should, sit down and play this game with their kids and their kid's friends. The heart of *Everway* is pure cooperative story telling and imagination, told through cards,

quests, and creativity. The only problem is that the game is very hard to find, but copies can be found for auction on eBay.

But These Were Left Behind . . .

Of course, there are games that should be skipped. They're tempting, they're wild but . . . nah. They're great to collect and fun to read, but there is something just wrong with them. Deeply, intrinsically wrong. Wrong on some Biblical level. Wrong on universe distorting levels. Maybe for her *second* game . . .

Personally, I love them, but there's no accounting for taste.

Human Occupied Landfill (HoL). HoL needs to be played drunk, and not drunk on something good, either. *HoL* practically screams for a bottle of Night Train or Mad Dog 20/20. Maybe it's the skills, like "Tolerate hideous amounts of bloody mutilation and still eat fast foods." Maybe it's Elvis as an example PC. Maybe it's the religious parody. And maybe it's just *HoL,* the gaming equivalent to a lobotomy with scribble art.

Macho Women With Guns. "Hey honey, let's play a game with scantily-clad bondage nuns on Harleys with leather habits and death dealing rosaries!" It's kind of like *HoL,* but with more chicks, more estrogen, and better art. (The guns are about the same size, though.) Blatantly chauvinistic and sexist, it's a great read -- but not a great first game.

Underground. Considering the most memorable detail about the setting of Underground is "Tasty Ghoul," a chain of human-flesh-selling fast-food restaurants (in the form of corpus crispies), this strange cyberpunk, post-societal collapse, superheroes meet Vietnam game is just . . . demented and bizarre. And, unfortunately, it's more of a commentary on American society than it is a roleplaying game. The early material is definitely a fun read, but it's hard to sell mildly psychotic militant pseudo-superheroes as good, clean family fun.

KULT. Remember those episodes of the *700 Club,* where Pat Robertson would extol roleplaying as akin to worshiping Satan? With *KULT,* you might think he had something there. There's a box on the front cover of *KULT 2nd Edition* which states: "We would like to add that this is not a statement about our beliefs, nor a creed which we in any way desire to impart to the reader. It is merely the setting of this role-playing game." This box did not appear in *KULT's* first edition, so one really has to wonder. Sure, it's a game of horror, but *reading* this game gives people nightmares. *Playing* this game, well, no one actually plays *KULT.*

And Those Other Game Thingies

Missing from the above list is a biggie, the universal gaming systems: *GURPS, CORPS, FUDGE, Rifts,* and *The Window.* They're female friendly and they're not at the same time. It depends heavily on the modules used with the system. They're very much like a "One size fits most" kind of game -- there are dozens of settings and worlds which can be plugged in like Lego blocks onto a backdrop of rules, but they might not work for everyone.

Genres such as Westerns or Supers might not work really well when introducing the game to a bunch of female players from *Boy Crazy!* age on up, but Fantasy might really do the trick. A little experimenting is in order with the system, the modules, and the players. The great thing about universal systems is that any mix of genres can be played, depending on the tastes of the players and what they enjoy, which makes roleplaying just that more creative, fun, and addictive.

Next Time

Less ranting, unless Decipher, Inc. wants to put out another cheesy card game. Time for some meat. We're going to go into gender roles in gaming. And the best, and most obvious place to start with gender roles is . . . online.

by Scott Nickell

Art by [andi jones]

Emperor Julianus nervously paced the throne room, awaiting word from the Royal Wizard in Extraordinary. His reign had been marred by internal strife, and he shuddered to think what might happen to his beloved land if he failed to produce an heir. But more than that, he loved his queen very much, and wanted more than anything to know that his child now grew in her womb. He did not wish to see her weep again at the thought that she might be barren.

The Royal Wizard entered the throne room silently. Julianus looked at him with imploring eyes, not daring to speak. "It is good news, Sire," the Wizard said, and he smiled warmly. "You shall have a son."

Rearing children is one of the most important driving forces in the mind of any creature, yet it is a topic almost entirely absent from roleplaying. Conception and childbirth, whether intentional or accidental, hold enormous potential for drama and storytelling. It is particularly important to kings and nobles to have an heir. The English break with the Roman Papacy, for example, was largely the result of Henry VIII's desire to divorce Catherine of Aragon for her failure to produce a son.

But even pregnancy with less far-reaching consequences is important to the parents, from a character actively trying to conceive a child, to an irresponsible bounder trying to *avoid* conceiving a child, to an adventurer dealing with the effects of actual pregnancy (as seen in the movie *Fargo*). Players experimenting with love and romance in roleplaying may wish to take the next step and raise a child together. This article is written with **GURPS** in mind, but the basic chances are taken from the real world, and should be usable in other game systems with a minimum of fuss.

Basic Pregnancy Roll

Overall, a couple actively trying to have a child has a 50% chance of conceiving in the first month. To maximize their chances, the prospective parents should engage in intercourse on four days during the week in which the woman is to ovulate.

To determine whether a couple conceives a child during any given act of intercourse, each parent should roll vs. HT, modified as below. If both rolls succeed, conception has occurred. If either successful roll is a critical success, make another roll for multiple births (see below).

The primary modifier to the Pregnancy Roll is the day of the woman's menstrual cycle that intercourse takes place. If within 24 hours (either way) of ovulation, each HT roll is at -1. An additional -1 is incurred for each day beyond, for a total modifier to each HT roll of -1 to -14. Note that this modifier should never be zero.

If a couple is actively trying to conceive a child, the time of ovulation can usually be determined by keeping track of the woman's basal body temperature, which drops on ovulation, then rises sharply the next day. At lower Tech Levels, when this is not possible, the parents may note that ovulation generally occurs 14 days before the onset of menstruation (which is also 14 days after, in an average, 28-day cycle).

If none of this is known (at low Tech Levels, for instance) or the parents are not keeping track, the GM may assign a modifier from -1 to -14 arbitrarily, or by rolling 2d-1.

Other modifiers to the basic Pregnancy Roll:

Male Roll

Low Sperm Count: -1 to -3
Intercourse in Woman-On-Top Position: -1
Woman remains on back for 1/2 hour: +1
Douching: -2

Female Roll

no significant modifiers

Multiple Births

About one in 87 births are twins, with the incidence of higher numbers of children dropping off by similar percentages.

If the basic pregnancy rolls were successful, and one of them is a critical success, make a further 3d roll. On a 10 or less, the conception has produced twins (on 11 or more, only a single child is conceived). On a 3-4, there will be triplets.

This roll can be treated as open-ended: Every time a 3-4 is rolled, add another child to the litter and roll again. The roll may be modified by the use of fertility drugs or other technological treatments, by subtracting 1 to 3 from the number rolled.

Pregnancy

Being pregnant is a disadvantage, worth a variable number of points depending on the stage of pregnancy.

Blessed Events

First Trimester (0-12 weeks) -25 points

During the first trimester, the mother will often suffer from morning sickness and mood swings. In *GURPS* terms, this translates to Manic-Depressive (p. CI92) at -20 points, and the following new disadvantage, for a total of -25 points. In the twelfth week, the baby's gender is distinguishable (though magic or ultra-tech may push this back). On a 3d roll of 10 or less, the baby is female; on 11 or more, it is male.

Morning Sickness -5 points

You suffer from nausea and sometimes vomiting, usually upon waking. At any time each morning, the GM may require you to make a HT roll. Failure means that you are incapacitated for a number of turns equal to the amount by which the HT roll was missed.

Second Trimester (13-26 weeks) -5 points

During the second trimester, the physical and psychological discomforts of the first trimester are less severe. Morning sickness is less common, and is an optional disadvantage at this point.

However, due to the discomfort caused by the increasingly large fetus, the mother is at Reduced Move -1 (-5 points).

Third Trimester (27-38 weeks) -35 points

The third trimester is somewhat more stressful, as the baby's size increases. The mother now suffers from the effects of being Overweight (-5 points), carrying 22 to 27 lbs. of extra encumbrance. In addition, the baby is not only heavy, it is inconvenient, uncomfortable and fragile, giving another level of Reduced Move, for a total of Reduced Move -2 (-10 points). The Manic-Depressive mood swings of the first trimester also return, for a total value of -35 points.

Birth

When the time has come to give birth, the length of labor can be determined by rolling 3d, adding 5 if it is the mother's first pregnancy (subsequent labors tend to be easier). The result is the number of hours the mother spends giving birth.

It is a good idea to have someone present during birth with the Professional Skill: Midwifery (M/A), which defaults to Physician-0 or First Aid-5. This person can help the mother deal with the stress of labor, as well as correcting some complications, such as a breech birth.

Assume that a birth goes as planned if the mother successfully makes a (HT+TL) or (HT+4) roll, whichever is higher. If the mother's roll fails, roll against the Physician or Midwifery skill of the attending health care provider, at -5 if the mother had a critical failure.

If this roll fails, the attending midwife is unable to easily correct the problem. In such cases, or where the baby is too large or labor is particularly long, a Caesarean section may be necessary. This is a surgical procedure. The first recorded Caesarean section on a living mother was performed in 1610, but it did not become widespread until the end of the 19th century. In earlier times, it was an act of desperation, restricted to use when the mother was already dead or dying.

If the health care provider's roll fails, *separate* Surgery rolls should be made to save baby's and mother's life. Use the normal Surgery rules (p. B56), with a -5 modifier if the Physician/Midwife roll was a critical failure. Failure on the baby's roll will kill it; failure on the mother's roll does 2d damage to her (4d damage on a critical failure), and may cause sterility (see p. CI84) if she fails a HT roll. The surgical team can opt to put either mother or baby at greater risk in order to save the other; if so, add a bonus of up to +3 to the Surgery roll of the favored patient in exchange for a matching *penalty* to the other's Surgery roll. See also ***Bio-Tech***, page 18, for additional details concerning surrogate motherhood.

A newborn infant as a Dependent is a 0-point (or less) loved one, appearing almost all the time (15 or less), for a total value of -96 points. However, if more than one parent is available to share responsibility, the frequency of appearance may be divided among them. If there are two parents dividing responsibility equally, the frequency of appearance would be 9 or less, making the child a -32 point Dependent for both. Also, as children age their point value will increase (use the table on p. B14 as a guide), and the frequency they need attention will decrease, resulting in lower values as Dependents.

Complications

This section is optional. Rolling for complications increases realism, but also adds more die rolls to the process, and will only rarely have any effect. The GM may rule that only mothers in high-risk categories need roll for complications.

Once a child is conceived, the mother should make a HT+4 roll. A failure indicates that the mother will miscarry; most miscarriages occur during the first trimester. A critical failure on this roll means that the child will be carried to term, but will suffer from birth defects. The following modifiers apply to this roll:

Mother over 35: -1
Malnutrition: -1 to -3, depending on severity.

Illness: -1 to -3, depending on the illness. A mother contracting German Measles should make a separate HT roll, at +2 for each month after the first. Failure means that the child will be born deaf, or with a reduced IQ, or with cataracts or other birth defects, with exact effects to be determined by the GM.
Exposure to Radiation: See below.

Exposure to radiation is a special case. See pages 145-148 of ***Compendium II*** for the effects of radiation on HT. Resolve these effects separately on both mother and child. Unborn children have a HT score of 1. If permanent HT is reduced to 0 or less, the child will be miscarried. Genetic effects of lesser doses depend on the campaign, ranging from severe birth defects to the awakening of miraculous powers, and should be determined by the GM. See ***Bio-Tech***, page 18 for some suggested effects of mutagens. Also, ***Creatures of the Night***, p. 78-79, has point values for some severe physical disadvantages, such as Human Torso and Siamese Twin.

During the first 42 days after conception, the embryo is particularly susceptible to radiation, and even a reduction of *temporary* HT to 0 will result in miscarriage.

Note that these results are based on the real world. In a campaign where exposure to radiation regularly results in super-powers instead of bone cancer, anything is possible.

When the full term of pregnancy approaches, a failed HT+5 roll will result in a premature birth. This roll is modified as follows, to a maximum modifier of -2:

Malnutrition: -1
Smoking: -1
Syphilis: -1
Youth: -1 per level
Drinking: -1 per drink over 5 per day
Other Drugs: -1

Preterm infants require special care, as they are susceptible to respiratory infections. At low tech levels, few will survive. At higher tech levels, virtually all these complications will be correctable.

Contraception and Sterility

Sometimes, these rules may be more important to someone trying *not* to have a child. Contraceptives all have an associated failure rate. If contraceptives are used, the GM should first make a failure roll for the method. If the method fails, then the normal Pregnancy Roll procedure comes into play.

The following failure rates are based on a 3d roll. These are "typical" failure rates, for the average modern (TL 7) user. The GM may assign a modifier of up to +3 if the couple is being particularly cautious. Contraceptive methods used at earlier tech levels will have higher failure rates than modern devices, at -1 per TL below 7, to a maximum modifier of -2. Also, if multiple methods are combined, each method must fail to result in possible pregnancy.

Sterilization is a surgical procedure, and sterility (whether natural or surgical) is a disadvantage worth -3 points (p. CI84). Menopause can be simulated by female characters making a separate Aging roll (p. B83), gaining the Sterile disadvantage on a failure. These rolls should begin at age 47. The failure rate for surgical sterilization is a critical failure (17-18), followed by a second roll of 14 or more. Norplant has a similar failure rate, and is effectively temporary (5-year duration) sterilization.

Contraceptive Methods

Contraceptive	Failure Rate	TL
coitus interruptus	12+	0
Diaphragm	14+	1

Condom	14+	2
Rhythm method	13+	3
Spermicide	12+	6
Pill	16+	7 (late 1950s)
IUD	16+	7
Sponge	13+	7 (1983)
Cervical Cap	14+	7
Sterilization	crit/14+	7
Hormonal Implant (Norplant)	crit/10+	7
Male Pill	16+	8

The "Male Pill" (actually a contraceptive vaccine) does not yet exist, but researchers are working on it even now. At higher tech levels, some of these methods may improve in effectiveness (a TL 11 Force Condom?)

The legal status of contraceptive devices depends on the campaign world, and the beliefs of the couple. For example, the rhythm method is the only method officially approved by the Roman Catholic Church. In the U.S., public access to contraceptive devices and knowledge was restricted from 1873 to 1936 by the Comstock Law.

Campaign Notes

In campaigns where nonhuman races exist, these rules can be modified slightly to cover other species. For instance, Elves do not age, but only produce one or two children. This may be nothing more than a cultural quirk, or it may indicate an earlier menopause in such races. Species that produce litters of offspring could use the same system for multiple births, but with a default of more than one child, or even adding children on a regular success, rather than a critical success on the multiple birth rolls.

Oviparous (egg-laying) species do not undergo pregnancy, but may take an egg as a Dependent. Hatchlings will tend to grow to independence more quickly than human children.

If there are multiple nonhuman races, cross-breeding may become an issue. The typical fantasy Half-Elf is a good example. If genetic science operates as we understand it (not a necessary, or even *likely* assumption in all campaigns), such hybrids should be Sterile. If two populations can produce fertile offspring, they are by one definition members of the same species. Of course, there could be interesting implications to the idea that humans and elves are merely subdivisions within the same race . . .

When designing racial packages for these half-races, note that such cross-breeding often results in *hybrid vigor*, due to the increased genetic diversity. In nature, hybrids tend to be larger and healthier than their parents. Remember, though, that this is true only for closely-related species; while this is reasonable for humanoid fantasy races from a single planet, alien species would probably need magical or technological help to produce a child at all, due to differences in biochemistry.

The medical problems inherent in cross-species pregnancies may be solved with magic, or with ultra-tech genetic engineering. This could allow even couples of wildly different sentient species to bear and raise children. It might even be possible to eliminate the sterility of these crosses. See p. 26-27 of **Bio-Tech** for some details on chimerization. In such cases, hybrid vigor would not occur, since they are not true genetic hybrids.

Children with particularly strong psionic talents may manifest their powers in the womb (an example occurs in the film *Scanners*). This should be entirely under the control of the GM.

In magical worlds, several spells could be useful to a midwife. Sense Life could be used as a pregnancy test. Body-Reading (p. G51) was used by the Royal Wizard in the introduction to determine the existence and sex of the king's unborn child. Certain birth defects might be correctable using Cure Disease, Restoration or Regeneration. The Youth

spell might be a convenient, and even (if the religion condones spellcasting) morally acceptable means of reversing an unwanted pregnancy, by regressing the embryo to an age before conception! See also *GURPS Technomancer* or David Pulver's [Bio-Tech Designer's Notes](#) article for several new spells directly related to pregnancy.

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Summary

Basic Pregnancy Roll

Each parent rolls vs. HT, -1 per day away from ovulation (minimum -1, maximum -14).

On a Critical Success, roll again for multiple births:

11 or more -- single birth
5-10 -- twins
3-4 -- triplets

Gender

Roll 3d:

10 or less -- Female
11 or more -- Male

Complications (optional)

Roll vs. mother's HT+4:

failure -- miscarriage
crit. Failure -- birth defects

Modifiers:

Mother over 35: -1
Malnutrition: -1 to -3
Illness: -1 to -3

Roll vs. mother's HT+5:

failure - premature birth

Modifiers (max. -2):

Malnutrition: -1
Smoking: -1
Syphilis: -1
Youth: -1 per level
Drinking: -1 per drink over 5 per day

Other Drugs: -1

Length of Labor

3d hours, +5 if first delivery

Complications During Birth

Roll vs. greater of mother's HT+TL or HT+4:

Success: no complications
On failure, roll vs. Physician or PS: Midwife

Success: complications corrected easily
On failure, roll vs. Surgery for mother and baby

Modifiers:

May elect to add bonus up to +3 to one roll by taking equal penalty to other.

Success: patient survives
Failure:

Baby: baby dies
Mother: mother takes 2d damage (4d on crit. Failure) and becomes Sterile on a HT roll failure.

Pyramid Review

Hunter Survival Guide

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Bruce Baugh, E. Johnathan Bennett, Michael Lee, Forest B. Marchinton, Robert Scott Martin, Angel McCoy, Deena McKinney, Wayne Peacock, Greg Stolze, Andy Woodworth and Pete Woodworth

136 pages, $19.95

Well, this is a good sign. *The Hunter Survival Guide* breaks away from the "first sourcebook" jinx., and provides a mostly very good guide to the monsters of the world, and the people who hunt them.

The release of the *Hunter: The Reckoning* rule book wasn't an entirely auspicious launch to the game line. Between the less than well received, "we've been sold! Whoops! No we haven't!" publicity stunt, and the fiery rantings of fans who felt betrayed that the characters had supernatural abilities, the game itself got kind of lost. Which is kind of a shame, because the game should be judged on its own merits, as weak or strong as they may be.

The *HSG* is a very good book. The introductory fiction, which covers the hippie characters from the *H:tR* intro-fiction, is an interesting study in a lot of ways, particularly in the (fairly creepy) view of the maternal instinct.

The source book starts off with a short section on [Hunter-net.org,](#) the website that the Hunters use for communication. It's followed up with a "how to" section from a Hunter. It's a bit on the creepy side, like when the writer suggests that you get by on three hours of sleep a day -- I turn cranky if I get less than ten -- and he has a bit o' the old gun fetish. It's also kind of fascinating, like when the author notes how a person can survive on a dollar a day, leaving them with more cash to spend on ammo, if they don't mind sleeping in bus shelters. For three hours a day.

It's an interesting perspective on the Hunter mindset. We see here how they can be willing to give up everything in order to pursue their goals. We see them fighting things they don't know how to fight, feeling uncertain of their ends, and questioning the means they use to accomplish them.

The point is further driven home by the actual continent chapters. They're covered in alphabetical order, from Africa to South America (Antarctica is, shockingly enough, ignored entirely). The best chapter for reading pleasure is Asia, which details a fair amount of information that should be familiar to a player of *Kindred of the East.* I particularly enjoyed the cameo by Strike Force Zero.

Each of the chapters is narrated by a "local" for that region. Africa is described from south to north by an Afrikaner policeman. He comes across as the perfect "nasty South African," using *Kaffir* in every other sentence and discarding pretty much all of the continent as savage. The chapter does a very good job of speaking beyond the narrator, conveying a good deal of useful info on the regions of the country.

Each continent is covered major country by major country, and each one has info on important topics for Hunters, from where they can hide out to how hard it is to smuggle in weaponry.

The section on North America is the weakest. It seems too cursory, not providing enough information for even the brief nation descriptions each of the other continents had, instead focussing on not terribly informative/entertaining tales of monster hunting adventure. Asia's description was a monster hunting epic that took time to look at the local scenery. Canada, for example, is given a short section on guns and a couple of stories that fail to help with the invocation of mood.

The book ends with a few monster types that seem pretty out of place. Until they appear, the book is a great resource for players, but these put it strictly in the realm of GM info.

HSG is a good intro to the world of *Hunter :The Reckoning.* It's also got some great info on the general WoD (hey, didja know there's a Toreador Methuselah sleeping in the Middle East? Well, now ya know) and how Hunters fit into it. It's a good sourcebook and a good read, and if the rest of *Hunter's* supplements keep up this level of quality, it should bode well for the game.

-- Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Pick

10 Million Ways To Die

Published by [Iron Crown Enterprises](#)

Written by John W Curtis III, Craig "Ichabod" O'Brien, and Coleman Charlton

112 pages, $16.00

A generation ago, ICE began life by publishing *Arms Law,* the first component of the *Rolemaster* roleplaying game, as a replacement combat system for other games, notably *AD&D.* With the release of *10 Million Ways To Die,* the wheel has turned full circle.

In essence, *10 Million Ways To Die* is a streamlined version of the *Rolemaster* and *Spacemaster* combat systems. It aims to provide a "plug and play" realistic alternative to other fantasy, historical, modern day, and science fiction combat mechanics. The title comes from the blurb on the back where a street thug is contemplating how he'll die ten million deaths at the hands of rival mobsters. It's not meant as a claim for the number of fatal ends for unlucky combatants described in the book, although there are plenty of them!

A combat run under *10 Million Ways To Die* will have the look and feel of a *Rolemaster* battle. Players still roll percentile dice to generate a random number, add their skill with the chosen weapon, and subtract their opponent's defensive bonus to produce a final result. The referee flips to the table for the attacker's weapon and cross-references the result with the defender's armor to read off how many hit points (if any) that the defender loses and if a critical strike has been made. If a critical occurs, it's time to turn to the appropriate critical strike table, and roll percentile dice, reading off a suitably gory description and mechanics effect from the table.

The complete description of the combat system, including examples, weapon and armor definitions as well as optional rules, requires a mere six well-written pages. All the normal *Rolemaster* rules concerning parrying, flanking and rear attacks, and so on, are considered optional, making the base combat mechanics playable by just about anybody. This is how *Rolemaster* should have been written!

Unlike traditional *Rolemaster Arms Law,* each attack table covers an entire category of weapons rather than a single weapon, so the "Light One-Handed Bladed Weapons" table represents everything from dirks to shortswords. For those who want to differentiate between individual weapons, there is an inset table of optional weapon-specific modifiers on each attack table. There are a few surprises to be found here, such as statistics for *Star Wars* Imperial Rifles, so if you're running a game in one of the popular science-fiction settings, take a look and you could be pleasantly surprised. *10 Million Ways To Die* rationalizes the medieval armor types of *Rolemaster* into a more usable eleven and then adds six types of ballistic cloth and far future armor. However because the rows of the tables now represent result ranges, the pages are less crowded and much easier to read than *Arms Law* equivalents.

It still takes 33 attack tables to handle the entire gamut of artificial and natural weaponry. Fortunately they are sensibly grouped, so page flipping is minimized. Moreover the weapon tables and critical strike tables appear in convenient double page spreads with the attack table on the left-hand page and the most likely critical table on the right-hand page.

I'm making such a big deal about table presentation and book structure here because they are crucial in determining whether *10 Million Ways To Die* is easy to use. There are three phases to resolving a combat action in *Rolemaster* --

rolling the dice, finding the result, and describing the effects of the action. Rolling the dice to generate the attack or a critical is fun! Describing an embarrassing fumble or a spectacular critical is also fun! The "grunt-work" of flipping to the right table and hunting the right entry in that table is not fun. It also wastes gaming time. An inexperienced *Rolemaster* referee can slow a combat down to a crawl simply tracking numbers. The presentation in *10 Million Ways To Die* really helps in reducing that "grunt-work." You would be hard-pressed to do it faster without computer assistance.

So what about those embarrassing fumbles and spectacularly gory criticals?

Some games allow for critical misses where really bad dice rolls mean that your character misses automatically. Others suggest that the referee makes up a suitable accident on the spot. Fumbling an attack using *10 Million Ways To Die* requires a roll on the fumble tables. Fumble effects can be as minor as a missed opportunity -- "Sweat trickles into your eye. You elect not to attack. Good choice" -- or more dangerous than a foe's attack -- "Why me? The gun explodes. Take 'C' Heat and Slash criticals." Much more exciting and realistic than an automatic miss, and the descriptions help players and referees to visualize the battle in their imaginations.

In some games, a critical hit means the opportunity to bypass an opponent's armor when calculating damage. Combat is just a mathematical exercise in reducing hit point totals with criticals simply hastening the process. The price of easy mechanics is uninspiring combats where the details will quickly blur with those of every other battle in one's memory. A critical with *Ten Million Ways To Die* is an opportunity to add vivid realistic detail to a combat. Each critical strike entry consists of some descriptive flavor text and a separate list of game mechanics (so that the flavor can be tweaked if circumstances dictate). The relish taken in gory detail and black humor that has been the hallmark of *Rolemaster* critical tables from the beginning remains evident, e.g. "Laser makes neat incision in foe's nose. Beam continues through spine, brainstem and back of head. Check out look on his face."

10 Million Ways To Die ends with a set of conversion notes to enable non-*Rolemaster* referees to adapt their combat statistics for this system with a minimum of fuss. Guidelines are supplied for nine major systems, including *AD&D* and *GURPS.*

For *Rolemaster* and *Spacemaster* gamers, the improved presentation of *10 Million Ways To Die* will increase playability without sacrificing the spirit of their games. For everyone else, this book is the easy route to three-dimensional combats without the trauma of changing game systems.

-- Nicholas H.M. Caldwell

Pyramid Pick

7th Sea Villain's Kit

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Developed by Jim Pinto

64 pages, $24.95

One of the best things about being a Game Master for *7th Sea* is that you get to play Villains.

Not bad guys.

Not anti-heroes.

Villains with a capital "V."

I'm talking about Sheriff of Nottingham- and Cardinal Richelieu-caliber heavies that your players will love to hate.

The *7th Sea* books have several of these guys and gals lurking in their pages, with names like Reis and Villanova. They are characters that make players sit up and take notice when they arrive on the scene.

Boo!

Hiss!

One of the best ways for GMs to enjoy these nasty folks is to join the Novus Ordum Mundi, one of the nine secret societies that, for a yearly fee, promises to let members affect the course of the ongoing *7th Sea* story. This annual membership costs $25 and nets you:

* four issues of the *7th Sea* newsletter
* four *No Quarter* cards available only to Society members
* *No Quarter* National Rankings for tournaments
* four letters updating you on the activities of the various secret societies
* a membership card
* discounts on direct purchase products
* four adventures available only to Novus Ordum Mundi members, and
* a Novus Ordum Mundi lapel pin.

Quite a stash.

To sweeten the deal, Alderac has released the *Villain's Kit.* To be completely fair, this book cannot be reviewed with the same criteria as a typical source book. That's because it isn't. When you buy it, you are actually buying a year's membership into Novus Ordum Mundi. Incidentally, if you are already a member, don't buy this book. Your copy will be arriving in the mail soon!

The *Villain's Kit* is simply a collection of odds and ends to hold you over while the rest of your goodies trickle in throughout the year. And what are the odds and ends? For the most part, good material that GMs will find at least interesting and at best very useful.

The Introduction chapter gives a complete synopsis of all the other secret societies running around Théah. Other than a layout error that caused a paragraph to be repeated twice, this is just a down and dirty summary that accomplishes exactly what it is supposed to.

You also get an introductory treasure hunt adventure called "Drake Footprints," which seems to be written with the goal helping novice players and Game Masters get a good feel for the whole swashbuckling genre. It has some classic elements (pirate battles, a daring prison break, deciphering a treasure map), but the problem that some may find is that the plot is fairly simple and straightforward without a lot of bells and whistles. There is some helpful advice to help first time GMs run a successful game, but veterans may find it all a bit dull. If this is the case, they should keep the plot and add on whatever extras they desire.

Why?

Well, "Drake Footprints" is the first AEG adventure that provides a response sheet. In other words, it is one of the stories that will help determine Théah's future in some form or fashion. It is a safe bet that some of the characters featured in it, namely Jacques and The Kire, will show up again.

The *Villain's Kit* also holds a sample setting, a tavern called The Powder Keg. A detailed map is provided, along with profiles of the proprietors and some regular patrons. This tavern can be dropped into any of Théah's nations without hassle and there are notes and plot hooks for whichever location best suits a GM's campaign. Any GM will find this a boon.

A section entitled "GM Tools" has some interesting observations and notes to enhance play and improve existing games. Guidelines are given on how to design nation-specific Brutes to throw at your players (for those who don't play *7th Sea,* Brutes are those nameless thugs that drop like flies in any action film) and how to exploit the language barriers that exist in Théah to muck players around.

John Wick provides the section's closing essay, called "Building A Better Villain." Crisp and well written, it serves as the anchor for the whole *Villain's Kit.* The definition of what it means to be a Villain in the world of *7th Sea* is clearly explained and ideas on how to portray such characters convincingly run rampant. Villains are the most important aspects of the game because they are the Heroes foils. How important characters are can only be measured by how dastardly the Villains get. It an easy enough concept and Wick makes it a useful and fun.

The *Villain's Kit* is rounded out with four new action maps for players to fight their way through (a theater, stable, coach house, and Vaticine chapel) and Campaign Construction Sheets that help GMs design and keep track of adventures.

The weakest part of this collection is 16 NPC "head shots" that take up four full pages. The idea is to use them as visual aids during a game, holding them up and saying, "You see this scarred pirate glaring at you over her dirty bottle of rum." These pictures are one trick ponies, unless the NPC in question becomes a regular feature of your game. Even then, it is doubtful you will need the mug shot very often. The art is of very mixed quality and may leave some readers wondering what else could have been placed on those four pages instead.

The *Villain's Kit* is 64 pages long. If its $24.95 price tag only covered the cost of the book, it would not be worth it. But, since the price includes membership into Novus Ordum Mundi, it is a good deal.

If you are a *7th Sea* player, or just looking for source material for another game, you'd best let this one slide.

However, if you are a *7th Sea* GM and want both memorable Villains and a chance for your campaign to have an effect on Théah's future, don your black cape, twirl your moustache, and practice your most menacing laugh. This one is a must-have.

-- Les Simpson

St. Dagobert's Sanctuary for Foundlings

by Loki Carbis

Art by [andi jones](#)

St. Dagobert's is a combination of hospital and orphanage run by Jesuit monks and a few lay volunteers. Although the Church does not condone births out of wedlock, neither does it condone the abandonment of the innocent products of such unions. More than a century ago, the Jesuits founded this particular mission in deference to humanity's imperfections. (Politically, they came under great fire from the majority of their brother and sister orders for this step, especially the Dominicans, since many viewed it as partially excusing the sin of adultery.)

The structure itself is large, but mostly unoccupied. The staff is far too small for the magnitude of the task that they have set themselves, and many sections of the building have fallen into disrepair. The upper two floors are considered dangerous and few ever venture there, while the basements are perpetually flooded to a depth of three feet (more in winter and early spring). Only the chapel, the wards, the dormitories and the secret entrance are well maintained. The secret entrance is a simple device -- an airlock-like chamber with an outer and inner door. Supplicants place the unwanted infant in through the outer door, close said door, and ring the bell next to the door. At this point, one of the staff will open the inner door, and the child will be accepted into the care of St. Dagobert (the patron saint of both orphans and large families, among other things).

The children are well cared for -- Jesuit medicine is more science and less superstition than most others practice (whatever the century) -- and educated to exacting Jesuit standards. At any age between six and eight years old, the Jesuits will do their best to find a place for the child, often apprenticing them to masters of various trades. (This is not as difficult as may be thought, since a Jesuit education is a great asset in a mostly non-literate age. Even after literacy becomes widespread, the standard of the education is still above average.)

All in all, St. Dagobert's Sanctuary for Foundlings is a quiet, respectable enterprise that is so much a part of life in its city that it is rarely questioned, and thus of almost no visible interest to characters. It is located in a run down part of whatever city is most distinguished by age, size or importance to the plot of the adventure (or any combination thereof). Likely candidates for such a city include London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Dublin, St. Petersburg, New York, Mexico City, Rio de Janeiro or Washington. (For obvious reasons, it is unlikely to be located in a city that is not predominantly Christian in its faith -- although it would be an interesting addition to Istanbul or Jerusalem, to name just two.) Wherever it is, it fades almost, but not quite, completely into the background. If that doesn't make them suspicious, the GM has a number of options at his or her disposal.

The documented connections of the Jesuits with the Knights Templar might well arouse the suspicions of players in any ***GURPS Illuminati*** game -- but even more so when the characters realize that the patron saint of the Sanctuary, Dagobert II, was a Frankish monarch of Merovingian descent. Is the Sanctuary part of some plan to restore the Merovingian bloodline to its rightful place? Or is something even more sinister going on? Dagobert's death in a somewhat suspicious hunting accident could have been a ritual sacrifice that the Sanctuary benefits from in some obscure fashion -- or perhaps the whole purpose is to find his soul when it reincarnates.

The Jesuits are the subject of many conspiracy theories, and the vast number of orphans they take in and educate (and

indoctrinate?) could easily become the basis of a conspiracy theory, accurate or otherwise. In Yrth, where the Sanctuary would be located in either Tredoy or Megalos, the Jesuits are already the subject of considerable suspicion (see the sidebar on page 27 of *GURPS Fantasy*) -- and their willingness to take in orphans of any race only adds to the whisperings against them. The Sanctuary could play a similar role in a *GURPS Technomancer* game (although the Jesuits are much less suspect in that particular setting). Other likely timelines for it to be located in include Dixie and Reich-4 (from *GURPS Alternate Earths*) or Cornwallis (from *GURPS Alternate Earths 2*).

The Sanctuary could well be a point where evil beings enter the world -- after all, the Jesuits might be completely innocent, but they have no way to determine who or what delivers the infants to them. Any number of possibilities for *GURPS Horror* campaigns could be happening. Are the Sidhe smuggling changelings into the world in preparation for their eventual return (in an odd *GURPS Celtic Myth* campaign)? Or are the children really lycanthropes (*GURPS Werewolf: The Apocalypse*), shape-stealing aliens (*GURPS Atomic Horror*), or something even further out? In a *GURPS IST* campaign, the Sanctuary might well be a front for the Black Moon Society, or most chillingly of all, the Exchange (see *GURPS Super-Scum*). Are the children having odd experiments performed on them, and if so, by whom and for what purpose? Any sort of scientific experiment could be from any of a host of *GURPS* settings -- and could even the most hardened Black Op gun down what appear to be innocent infants and toddlers?

It's always possible, of course, that one or more of the characters is an alumnus of the institution. If so, they may well have learned more than they bargained for, or even more than they are aware of, ala *The Manchurian Candidate.* This makes for a particularly nice twist any time the GM wants to encourage the characters to suspect and distrust each other. Alternately, a former recipient of the Sanctuary's largesse could well find that the Jesuits need a few good men (and women) for a very important mission -- although whether this makes it a Patron, an Ally Group, a Dependent Group or even an Enemy will depend on the campaign. In short, the Sanctuary can serve virtually any function that the GM can devise for it. May St. Dagobert smile upon you.

by Les Simpson

Brave New World is a roleplaying game about people with superpowers. These people are collectively known as deltas, and the game revolves around their struggles in a modern-day fascist America. The entire country has been under martial law since Jackie Kennedy was assassinated by rogue deltas in Dallas back in 1963. Now all deltas must register themselves as lethal weapons and constantly report their movements. Players' heroes are members of the Defiance Movement, the loosely organized delta resistance that is fighting to restore the country's democratic promise of liberty and justice for all.

Pyramid recently had a chance to chat with Matt Forbeck, the man behind ***Brave New World,*** and get his thoughts on his creation and an idea of where it will go next.

Pyramid: First off, Matt, let's talk a little bit about you. You're ***Brave New World's*** creator, but what else should we know about you?

Matt Forbeck: ***Brave New World*** is hardly my first game. I've been working creatively in the adventure game industry for over 10 years now. The game lines I've worked on include ***Deadlands: The Weird West, Deadlands: Hell on Earth,*** the ***WildStorms CCG, Silent Death: The Next Millennium, Mutant Chronicles, Doomtrooper,*** the ***Kult CCG, Doomtown, The Great Rail Wars, Warzone, Blood Bowl, AD&D, Middle-earth Roleplaying, Chill,*** and ***Space Hulk.*** I've also written short stories for ***Deadlands: The Weird West, Vampire, Changeling, Shatterzone, TORG,*** and ***Mutant Chronicles.***

I spent the last four years as the president of Pinnacle Entertainment Group, which originally published Brave New World. I've since left the company and sold ***Brave New World*** to my good friends at AEG, the publishers of ***7th Sea, Clan War,*** and the ***Legend of the Five Rings RPG.***

It was hard to leave Pinnacle, but it was the right thing to do. I find it a lot more fun to spend my days designing and writing games instead of helping to run a company. These days I'm writing all of the new ***Brave New World*** books, plus I'm doing a bit of freelance design and consulting on the side.

I live in Wisconsin, where I work out of my house. The best part of this is that I get to spend a lot of time with my wife and our toddling son.

Pyramid: And what about ***Brave New World*** itself? This certainly isn't the Aldous Huxley novel. In fact, the tag line I have seen is "Superhero Roleplaying in a Dark America." What, exactly, does that mean?

Forbeck: First, it doesn't have anything to do with Huxley, which is one of the reasons I put my name on the cover of the book -- to help avoid confusion. The title actually comes from Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* It's a line from Miranda,

the daughter of the wizard Prospero. She's been living on an island with her father and their servant her entire life, and when she sees a man from the outside world for the first time, she says, "O brave new world that has such people in't." I thought that made for a perfect title for a superhero game.

The fact is that *Brave New World* isn't about superheroes in the way that most people think about them: four-color models in spandex stopping bank robberies and facing off against equally silly villains. It's really about a dark variant on the real world, and the heroes just happen to have some minor powers that set them apart from the herd -- in ways both good and bad. It makes them the target of some serious hostility while also giving them the power to do something about the state the world is in.

Pyramid: The game is different from other superhero RPGs in ways other than its setting and back story, though. The tone is very gritty, where a gun is just as dangerous to most deltas as it is to your average Joe. Why realistic superheroes?

Forbeck: Because they're the most fun. Seriously, Superman bores me to tears. Every issue, the writers have to come up with a brand-new, absurd means of challenging the most powerful person on the planet. After a while it gets ridiculous.

What does heroism mean to someone who very likely can't be killed and actually risks very little to help others? When a real person risks life and limb to help someone else, that's heroic. The heroes in *Brave New World* are just a small step above a regular person, power-wise, and they take the same kinds of risks as we would. That makes the game that much more exciting and meaningful -- and fun.

Pyramid: The whole Delta Registration Act, and many other concepts found in *Brave New World,* are clearly symbolic of real life issues, bringing another sense of realism to a fantastic setting. Would you like to comment on what issues in particular, if any, you were addressing?

Forbeck: Obviously I'm making some comments on bigotry, but the larger issue in the game is this question: How far are we willing to go to feel safe from terrorism? What kinds of rights are you willing to give up? More importantly, when you think these rights are someone else's, how many of those are you willing to give up?

In a world in which we have kids shooting kids in high schools, in which we have home-grown terrorists blowing up buildings, in which we have an armed lunatic actually storming into the Capitol building, how far are we willing to go to feel safe? Who are we willing to blame? And what really should we be doing about it? I don't claim to have the answers to these questions, but the game does raise the issues.

Of course, that's all behind the scenes. Like any other game, it's all about having fun, and there's plenty of that to go around.

Pyramid: *Brave New World* has another feature in its setting that makes it unique: religion. Mixed in with superpowers and dictatorships, it first seems like an odd element, but actually comes across very well. You portray religion, in the form of the Covenant, as an institution, capable of both good and evil. How hard is it to do justice to religion in a role playing game, especially one of this nature?

Forbeck: I'm a lapsed Catholic who went through 11 years of Catholic school, so I've got some education in this area, and I've given it a lot of thought over the years. Religion actually has a lot to do with what's happening in *Brave New World,* much of which will become apparent in the *Bargainers* and *Covenant* books, both of which I believe are due out this year.

I don't think it's hard to do religion justice in a game. It's a part of many people's lives across the world and especially in this country. Ignoring it would mean ignoring a large part of our culture. I'm still wrestling with some of the ways that the forces behind the religions work in *Brave New World,* although I'm pretty set on how the worshipers understand them.

This actually all ties into the hidden backstory behind the game, most of which I'll reveal when we get to *Crossroads,*

which is tentatively scheduled for 2001.

Pyramid: I guess the only complaint I have heard about *Brave New World* is its template system for character creation, where you receive power packages instead of cherry picking your different super powers like in other games in the genre. Would you like to respond to those critics?

Forbeck: Sure. My belief is that most of those critics are experienced roleplayers who were disappointed that they didn't have another game system to pick apart. Honestly, there are already lots of great systems that allow you to cherry pick your powers and develop the superhero from hell. I didn't want to cover that well-trodden ground.

Brave New World was written so that beginning roleplayers could leap right in and start playing. Character creation is a snap, and it gives you fun, easy heroes that fit well into the world. If you, as a player, really want something else, I suggest taking your favorite game system and building your own hero with it. Then come on over and play in the *Brave New World* setting.

Honestly, the only rule here is have fun. You're playing in the comfort of your own home, and I'm not going to come in there and tell you that you're doing it wrong.

Pyramid: Okay, Matt, now that we've got a firm grip on what *Brave New World* is, let's talk where it is going in 2000. Is 2000 going to be a brave new year?

Forbeck: Oh yeah. There will be six new *Brave New World* books in 2000, maybe seven since *Defiants* has slipped into the new year.

The first, then, is *Defiants,* which is more on the rebellion against the oppressive American regime. After that is *Delta Prime,* which allows the players to become part of the American government that's fighting to put down the rebellion -- for the good of the nation, of course. Then it's *Bargainers,* which delves into a class of hero that has the ability to talk and make deals with demons. This might seem a bit of a tangent, but it actually fits nicely in with the unfolding backstory behind *Brave New World.*

Next up is *Crescent City,* the main campaign setting for *Brave New World.* This is the city that grew up in the ruins around the crater where Chicago used to be. Then it's the special core book for the year, a monster of a book called *Glory Days,* which puts the heroes into WWII in the world of *Brave New World.*

And much more after that, of course.

Pyramid: A World War II superhero game? When I hear that, I have images of Captain America fighting the Red Skull. However, going by what has come before, I have a feeling this is going to be much more serious. Am I right?

Forbeck: Oh yeah. I think of it more as a cross between *Indiana Jones* and *Saving Private Ryan.* There are some serious issues to work with here, but I don't think that needs to get in the way of the fun. There will be some cheesy costumes and the like, since this was a more idealistic age, but since it's a 21st-century game, there are going to have to be some modern sensibilities overlying it. I'm just starting some of the research on this. There's a lot to know!

This is not a standalone game, however. It's a setting book which gives the players a whole new way to play the game. It just didn't seem to make much sense to include the whole ruleset again though, so we're going to leave that part out. It's also a standalone setting in the sense that no supplements for it are planned. If there's enough demand, we might do some, but at first we're going to simply concentrate on stuffing as much as we can into the book.

Pyramid: You mentioned *Crossroads* a minute ago, a project that was alluded to in the *Brave New World* rulebook. That sounds like another spin off. Can you drop a few hints about it or is it still classified information?

Forbeck: That's where I spill the beans on what's happening behind the scenes in *Brave New World.* It's likely going to be another setting book, like *Glory Days.* However, this is where we get into the alphas and how to create and play them. With a power-level jump like that, the challenges have to rise to meet the heroes, so you can expect to be

playing on a whole different level.

Pyramid: It sounds like you are going to be pretty busy, then. Has the switch from Pinnacle to Alderac yielded any significant changes for *Brave New World*?

Forbeck: Not really. AEG was handling some of Pinnacle's business management duties before this new arrangement, so I was already good friends with the people at AEG. I'm still writing the books and handling the layout. The only real change is that the art direction is now in the capable hands of AEG's Jim Pinto.

Unfortunately, the transition did cause some inevitable delays, so *Defiants* is now very late. As I write this, though, it's just getting off the press. Plus, *Delta Prime* is already in final production, and I'm working on *Bargainers* right now, so we're right back on schedule. With any luck, there shouldn't be any real delays in 2000.

Pyramid: Alderac is trying for a new level of player interaction with *7th Sea,* with different fan clubs, websites, contests and the like. Is anything of this nature planned for *Brave New World*? If it is, it would seem that the Delta Times website, www.deltatimes.com, would be a perfect staging ground.

Forbeck: It certainly would. We're having some conversations about that right now. It's really up to AEG to set this stuff up. They've done such a great job with *7th Sea,* though, that I don't think it'll be long until you see a similar amount of support for *Brave New World.*

Pyramid: How about other *Brave New World* products? Is a line of miniature figures still planned? Will there ever be a *Brave New World* collectible card game, novels, or comic books?

Forbeck: I'd love to see all of these things. I believe AEG is still planning on a *Brave New World* miniatures line, and I've had some thoughts about a game for it someday. As for CCGs, novels, and comics, I'd love to do all of those -- and we very likely will -- but for right now I'm going to concentrate on getting the game back on track and making it the most fun it can be.

Pyramid: Well, even without those additions, *Brave New World* has generated a devoted following. Is there anything you would like to add before we go?

Forbeck: I'd like to thank all the players out there for picking up and playing *Brave New World* and -- most of all -- for being patient. There is a lot more *Brave New World* stuff on the way, and I know you're going to love it.

[*Editor's Note:* You can download the core *Brave New World* rules, background, and character sheet at www.peginc.com/BraveNewWorld/BNW.html.]

Secrets of Your Local Friendly Game Store

This month's column will return squarely to the realm of reality. This time, let's take up an issue and a question that gamers struggle with on a daily basis. Or, if not daily, then at least monthly at new releases time. The issue is the Friendly Local Game Store (FLGS) and the specific question is, "What are these people thinking?" I talk with fans all the time who ask such questions as "Why isn't my FLGS at the local mall?" and "Why don't they carry anything besides the core books and new releases?" and the most plaintive of all questions, "Why don't they carry *Insert: The Name* at all?" The thought that went into each of these decisions, and most others around FLGS's are grounded in sound business practices. It is just that most players do not know what the principles are. Today, I will be revealing some of the "Secrets of your Friendly Local Game Store."

The first thing to say about an FLGS is that it is a business. The people who run it may have opened the business because of a lifelong love of gaming or a family threat to "make something out of this hobby or give it up" but, especially if the store opened before the CCG craze, weathered that transition, and survived the crash, that store is a real business. And as a business, it is subject to all the usual business pressures -- including Location, Stocking, and Competition.

Location

No matter what kind of business we talk about, it has to be located somewhere (yes, even Internet stores, but we'll talk about that later). Even amateur Real Estate brokers can tell you that the most important three things in starting a business are 1) Location, 2) Location, and 3) Location. But what only a professional can tell you is that it is not usually that simple. There are all sorts of limitations and problems with opening and maintaining stores, some of which dictate where a store can be.

The primary issue is traffic. Stores have to have people coming in to buy, or else they're not stores. They might be other good things like large gaming halls, but they're not stores. Now a traditional FLGS is a "destination store." That is to say, that the people who go into them set out to go there, the store is their "destination" when they leave the house. These kinds of stores are good, since they can be anywhere. Other kinds of stores that depend on "walk-by" traffic must be in places with people walking by, like a main street or a large shopping mall.

Retail developers and shopping mall managers know this and they charge for traffic. The more people who frequent a particular mall, the more expensive it is to locate there. And, like it or not, most people out in shopping malls aren't looking for more *Warhammer* minis, or the latest *Call of Cthulhu* release, and wouldn't buy them even if given the chance. Traffic equals sales for some stores, but a traditional FLGS is usually better off locating outside the mall.

Note that I say "traditional" FLGS. There is a new model of store that has the potential to do very well in a shopping mall setting. These stores are ones that focus more on the kinds of games that appeal to mall-goers. Board games, family games, and party games do very well, often well enough to support a reasonable sized RPG or miniatures section. However, to compete in a mall setting for "traffic" the stores have to match the attractiveness and service of other mall-based stores. I know veteran gamers who wouldn't dare shop in a store where the clerks wear polo shirts embroidered with the store's logo. I also know soccer moms who wouldn't dare shop in a store where the clerk was wearing a t-shirt that said, "Vecna Rules!" Neither of these stores is making a mistake, they're just going after different markets.

Some FLGS owners are starting to catch on to both markets and are opening little "kiosks" or carts in the middle of the mall to sell family and party games. Customers who want more or different kinds of games are referred to the larger store out of the expensive center city. This can be a very happy medium.

Stock

Talk about small kiosks with limited space brings up the issue of stock. Many of the most common complaints about the FLGS are about the narrowness of stock. To understand the decisions about stocking, it is necessary to understand the following few terms: footprint, adjusted gross value, and turns.

In the real world, things take up space. The amount of space a product takes up is called its footprint. Some things' footprint changes based on its orientation. Think of a typical RPG on a shelf. If it is turned cover out, its footprint is much larger that if it is spine out. A quick look into my library tells me that a shelf full of **GURPS** books spine out is four books wide; front cover out, and it is 80. The price of something divided by its footprint is its adjusted gross value. That four-books-wide shelf of cover-out books has a retail price of around $80, or just over $2.30/inch. The spine-out shelf of the same width is worth $1600. Same physical space, 20 times the value. But no matter how much the space is potentially worth, it is worth zero is the games don't sell, and that's where turns come in.

Turns are the number of times the thing that takes up a particular space in the store is sold. Think about it this way, when you buy a book, that space doesn't stay empty, the FLGS manager fills it with another book and tries to sell that one. The number of times that process occurs in a year is the store's annual turns. So, now it should be clear -- the store's yearly sales should be adjusted gross value of the usable display space times turns.

Increasing a store's sales should be easy. One way is to increase the store's adjusted gross value, which means packing more products into the same space by using falling racks, or by overlapping covers. The danger is that the products might be difficult to see, which could adversely affect the store's turns. Maximizing the store's turns is the other way, but that usually involves stocking products that move quickly and without much work -- new releases from hot game lines and the core products of established lines. This technique, however sacrifices the potential sales of backlist releases.

Another big issue driving what a store can or should stock is the store's lease. Many shopping malls have very well defined restrictions regarding the kinds of items a store can sell. Most indoor malls prohibit the selling of used merchandise, for example. Of course, there are notable exceptions, but this policy explains why few mall-based game stores sell used comics, games, or secondary-market CCG singles. Some landlords may have limits on the subject matter the games may address.

Some stores don't carry products they can't easily display. POP displays for CCGs, standard size RPG books, and blister packed miniatures are accommodated without trouble. Large format boxed games and smaller format RPG books may be perceived as more trouble than they're worth. Conversely, these unusual formats may work to the game's advantage. Small format books, for example, must be displayed in front of large format books, where customers can see them. Hmmm . . .

Finally, stocking decisions can, in some cases, be dictated by what a store can get from its own suppliers. Most traditional game distributors do not handle computer software, for example. That fact makes it hard for stores to discover or even get in computer games which their customers might otherwise enjoy. Likewise, the small quantities which an FLGS is likely to buy make it difficult for them to get the quantity discounts which can make them price-competitive with software superstores.

Competition

Which brings us to the trickiest part of business, remaining competitive. Customers choose where to buy things based on a dizzying array of factors. There are so many things that go into making these decisions that there are people who make great fortunes attempting to analyze them. The two I want to highlight today, though, are service and price. In areas with more than one FLGS, they compete with each other. I discussed above some of the ways that appearance and stock selection can affect the customer base and define a stores market. But, I also choose these two things because they are at the crux of the conflict between brick-and-mortar retail stores and their online cousins.

From a service standpoint, your basic FLGS has several advantages. For one, it is at least L and presumably F. If so, there are actual tangible benefits to getting in the car and going down to the store. One of these is store employees with whom you may have built a relationship. They know your preferences, and have a sense of what else you might

like. But moreso than that (because an online store can have that) is that there are other customers with whom you may also build relationships. Open gaming areas, demo space and knowledgeable people all help you to make more informed game-buying decisions. There is also the undeniable fact that, for most games, you can hold them in your hand in the store and page through the contents. And finally, once you have put down the money, the game is yours -- immediately.

Online game stores can have one huge service advantage. In places where there is no game store, online is often the only way to go. In that way, they perform a great function and earn their keep on that fact alone. To a gamer with no local game shop, online stores can be a godsend.

Another advantage online stores can have is pricing. Harnessing the power of the Internet to reduce the need for employees, rent, backstock, and other overhead can allow online retailers to reduce prices charged to customers. In many cases, prices can be lowered enough to cover the costs associated with shipping purchases to the customer. There is also the perception that online customers don't have to pay sales taxes. (Technical business note: This is not strictly true. Online retailers do not have to collect state sales taxes. Customers, however, may still be obligated to pay the tax directly to their home states. Enforcement on these laws have been weak, but as mailorder and online grows, it may get bigger.) There is also tremendous resistance on the part of game manufacturers to online game shops. There is at least one manufacturer who requires that its products not be sold at less than the MSRP (Manufacturer's Suggested Retail Price) by online stores. This is ostensibly to protect the interests of the FLGS.

The actions of your FLGS may appear confusing at first, but they don't have to remain that way. Basic business forces are at work in all markets, even our own. With a little knowledge and observation, they won't long remain the secrets of your FLGS.

On a personal note, this column was inspired by a number of e-mails I received suggesting topics for my column. Thanks to all those who wrote in. As always, if you have questions about the business of gaming you'd like answered in this space, please feel free to drop me a line at micahj@io.com.

The Penultimate Column

Well, the cat's out of the bag, so what else is there to talk about?

Next week's issue will be my last. After nearly six and a half years associated with *Pyramid* and Steve Jackson Games (this time . . .), I'm moving on. I'll be working for Innovative Studios, a Florida-based company that does a lot of things, some of which I'm probably not cleared to know about. But they have some great ideas for using the net to connect gamers with retailers, retailers with distributors, gamers with each other, freelancers with publishers, and just about any other combination you can think of. And I'll be doing . . . well, pretty much what I'm doing now.

I'll bore you with the details some other time. It's not *Pyramid's* job to be plugging my new gig, anyway.

They say that moving and changing jobs are two of the most stressful things a person can do, and now I've gone and piled them one on top of the other. Serves me right. So, if this column comes off a little disjointed (and how would that be different from many of the others, you may ask?), my apologies.

More New RPGs

The vast unpaid research department reminded me of another new RPG due out this year, and I must admit this one has some potential -- *Dune,* from Last Unicorn Games. I loved the original book (and the first sequel or two, though it started to go downhill kind of quickly), and I think we can forget about the movie. But LUG has demonstrated they can handle a licensed property well, with the now-hitting-on-all-cylinders *Star Trek* lines. (Is it my imagination, or did they recover from their slow start on those games just about the time Ken "Suppressed Transmission" Hite come on board? Ken, of course, is much too humble to suggest anything of the sort, but I'll do it for him.) The main rulebook (and the first four supplements) are all listed at the [Last Unicorn *Dune* website](#) as "Coming Soon," but my informant swears they'll be out this year. Sounds good to me.

Regrets? I've Had A Few

The more I think about leaving *Pyramid,* the more I realize I have to say. More than can fit in just one column next week. So I'll get the recap off to a start now. And to make sure that next week's column is a high-note tearfest, I'll talk about what I thought were the downsides of this grand online experiment (or at least, our implementation of it).

To be fair, what went wrong -- or simply wasn't as good as I would have liked -- is a short list of minor stuff, especially compared to all that went right. But I want to close off my chapter of the *Pyramid* story with full disclosure, so I'll mention a couple of things.

I know the customer is always right, but it always annoyed me that the readers so strongly resisted all attempts to broaden the scope of *Pyramid* beyond roleplaying. It's not surprising -- most readers came to us from already being fans and customers of Steve Jackson Games, and that meant, mostly, *GURPS.* And the non-RPG titles I *could* get the readers interested in were still SJG products -- *INWO, Car Wars, Ogre.*

And you can probably lay the blame to some degree on the quality of the non-roleplaying articles we've run. They're not as good as most of the RPG stuff, I'll admit. But I was going for a balance, and the submissions were decidedly *un*balanced. So, I had to dig deeper in the pile to come up with non-RPG articles, and the quality wasn't quite as high.

And to be fair, within the realm of roleplaying, I think we've done a decent job of covering a lot of other games. The "More *GURPS*!" cries are not as common or as strident as they were in the early days, and I don't know if it's because they got tired of complaining (not *our* readers, I can hear you saying), or because they came to see that the other material we were doing had some value to them.

I think information providers have an obligation to broaden the horizons of their audience. I remember back in 1993, I went back to Texas A&M to help celebrate the 100th anniversary of *The Battalion,* the student newspaper I was on the staff of while I was in school. Anyway, one of the guest speakers was a bigwig at the *Houston Chronicle,* and he was waxing eloquent about their early forays into online news delivery. One of the advantages, he said, was that customers could customize their news: If they didn't want hockey scores, they could set it up so they didn't get them.

I thought (and still think) that this is a bad idea. It's a short step from, "Don't send me hockey scores, because I don't care about hockey," to, "Don't send me anything that makes my favorite politician (or company, or religion, or ethnic group) look bad, because I don't want to know." In real, bigtime journalism, the information providers have an obligation -- a near-sacred duty -- to tell people things they don't think they want to know, or don't know they should know, but *need* to know. Pretty arrogant of those journalists to think they're the ones that get to decide, isn't it? But somebody's got to do it, and the generally poor job the media giants of our age have been doing at it lately doesn't mean it shouldn't be done.

Same thing here. For the good of the hobby, and simply to expand the horizons of the readers, I wanted to make *Pyramid* more general interest than it turned out to be. More computer gaming, more online gaming, more board games and card games, even play-by-mail and wargames and maybe even mass-market and family games. Didn't happen. A regret.

And before I gush and froth about the tremendous support *Pyramid* has received from its readers and contributors (that's next week, remember), I will discourse briefly on the double-edged sword that is Committed Fandom.

The good news is, they hang on your every word and have a strong emotional commitment to what goes into the magazine. The bad news is, they hang on your every word and have a strong emotional commitment to what goes into the magazine. The nitpicking and the slams that individual articles have received on the message boards are very discouraging.

A little math: A $15.00 subscription, divided into 52 weeks, comes out to 28.8 cents an issue. Each issue contains 10 or 11 new articles, columns, and cartoons. That's less than 3 cents an item.

Somebody worked very hard on each and every one of those items. Some of our more professional contributors take much less than their going rate and still contribute to *Pyramid,* out of loyalty, good-heartedness, and a generally poor business sense. And each reader pays 3 cents to see it, and some of those people then dismiss it with an, "Eh." Or a slam.

I'm not going to say, "if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Criticism and feedback are a very important part of what all communication professionals do. But please try to make your criticisms more constructive. I think we'd all appreciate it.

And my last regret is that we weren't able to do more. *Pyramid* makes a modest profit at its current staffing level, they tell me, and that's very, very good. It means that the magazine will continue in its present form for the foreseeable future, and that's a good thing. But to justify what they were paying me, I had to try to hold my work on the magazine to about 10 hours a week (not that I ever succeeded . . .). So the slushpile got huge, and some of my editing work was rushed, and I didn't follow up on some things like I should have.

And it wasn't just *my* time. Jackie Hamilton and Keith Johnson have done a lot of great work on the technical side of running *Pyramid* -- both adding new features and tweaking old ones -- but *Pyramid* wasn't their top priority very much of the time. SJ Games has a big, big website, with lots of stuff going on, and it all demanded their attention. So sometimes *Pyramid* didn't get all the technical TLC it could have. And this is no knock on anybody -- I understand why it happened, and agree with the decisions that set it up that way. But I regret it.

Speaking of Regrets . . .

Time for a Dreaded Slushpile Update. The count of unread articles dropped down to 120 this week. My plan to do 20

articles a day lasted for exactly one day, and then other pressing duties (like shopping for furniture) interfered. My new goal is to cut the pile in half before next Friday, and we'll just hope for the best. And whoever becomes the new editor, I assume they'll put the disposition of the remaining slushpile at the top of his or her list.

And no, as I write this, I have no idea who the new editor will be. Perhaps that will be revealed next week.

And remember, next week it's the all smiles and teary hugs, big goodbye to *Pyramid* edition of "Second Sight." Don't miss it!

-- Scott D. Haring

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

The Suppressed Transmission Tarot IV: The Suit of Cups

"Madam Sosostris, famous clairvoyante
Had a bad cold, nevertheless
Is known to be the wisest woman in Europe
With a wicked pack of cards."
-- T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land,* I:43-46

Once again, the cards turn up for us, this time in the Suit of Cups. Where Knives cut to Horror and Forks pointed the path to Alternate History, the Cups contain secrets and magic, the glamour shimmering just below the rim of the world. The realm of Secret History is the realm of the uncanny, the sorcerous, the underground stream and the sacred river. As in traditional Tarots, the Suppressed Transmission Tarot holds the Cups as the "Water suit." As is also traditional, I recommend Bill Butler's *Dictionary of the Tarot* as a guide through the fluidity of Tarot interpretation. These interpretations continue the "Tarot by example" trend of the previous columns, and again these archetypes can represent spirits, entities, or similar beings in your game. Perhaps they can be summoned by the pouring (or ingesting) of specialized, alchemical libations. So drink deep, and gaze behind the veil.

"To be now a sensible man,
By and by a fool, and presently a beast!
O strange! Every inordinate cup is unblessed
And the ingredient is a devil."
-- William Shakespeare, *Othello,* II:iii

The Holy Grail (Ace of Cups): In a hidden grotto, the green glass Grail sits, embossed with the Alpha, the Omega, and the Spencerian swoosh symbol of Coca-Cola. From out of the Grail pour five springs of water, joining together into Alph, the Sacred River of Xanadu, the Underground Stream of the West. Interpretation: the hidden source, the Key to it All.

Norumbega (Two of Cups): Sir Walter Raleigh, wearing a red rose badge and bearing a silver chalice, steps onto an unmarked American beach, one foot in the ocean and one on the sand. Waiting to meet him on the shore is a Mohican sachem, holding a golden chalice. Behind the sachem, a round Templar tower rises, emblazoned with a red cross. Interpretation: union, meeting, possession.

The Prieuré de Sion (Three of Cups): A long-haired Joseph of Arimathea, an African Dogon prince, and a pregnant Mary Magdalene sail into the delta of a wide river lined with bulrushes. Their boat has a purple sail; all three hold red gold cups full of purple wine. Around the boat, three dolphins frolic. Interpretation: birth, bloodlines, the product of a union.

Nabonidus (Four of Cups): A richly-garbed Babylonian potentate sits regally on his throne at the side of a trench cut in the earth, where laborers dig. Behind him, on the Tigris, rises a four-layered ziggurat bedecked with lapis. At the side of the trench sit an ivory cup, a red clay cup, and a green jade cup. Nabonidus has only eyes for the black onyx goblet being handed out of the trench, however. Interpretation: luxury, ennui, search for new sensation.

Glozel (Five of Cups): A company of scholars argues in a museum, waving papers bedecked with the cryptic symbols of Glozel. Unnoticed by them in a display case in the foreground are five broken goblets, one of which glows with eerie power. Other artifacts in the museum cases nearby include a clay model boat, a triple-headed goddess figurine, and a stuffed mermaid. Interpretation: disharmony, bitterness, remnants.

Compagnons des Devoirs (Six of Cups): Three medieval stonecutters gather around a master architect holding a compass and a goblet. The sacred geometry of this grail is to be recapitulated in Gothic architecture by these illuminated masons, heirs of the Templars and ancestors of the Freemasons. Above them in the rose window of the

cathedral are five cups arranged in a pentagram. Interpretation: memory, the secret or lingering tradition.

The Goblin Market (Seven of Cups): Two sisters, dressed in artistic Victorian garb, ooh and aah over a golden cup, not seeing the snake coiled within it. The stall has six other cups on display. Out of these cunningly incised goblets peep a leering homonculus, a dark tower, a bed of pearls, a manticore, a clown, and an ivy tendril. The grinning, hairy keeper of the stall has greenish skin and pointed ears (and teeth). Interpretation: illusion, delusion, lies.

Irem, City of the Pillars (Eight of Cups): Irem sits in the desert, and its eight pillars stretch up into the night sky under Orion and Canis Major. In front of the city a bronze horse statue sits sunk halfway in the sand. Frankincense bushes dot the dunes. Silhouetted against the night, at the top of each tower rests a cup. Interpretation: abandoned success, departure, ruins.

Paul Bunyan (Nine of Cups): Nine cups lined up in an arch glow in the clouds above Paul Bunyan, who leans on his axe next to Mount Rushmore, which he's obviously just carved. Paul's face is the same size as those of Washington, Lincoln, Jefferson, and Roosevelt. Babe, the Blue Ox looks on placidly. Interpretation: material and martial success, prosperity.

Urban Fantasy (Ten of Cups): A city at night, lampposts and neon Coca-Cola signs glowing and cars driving down the streets. It's just rained, and the streets are wet, lights reflect oddly in some of the puddles. The stoplights seem somewhat cup-shaped, and a license plate reads "GRAIL." A nightclub marquee proclaims the establishment "Kup's," as a nearby sign promises "$10." Interpretation: small miracles, the city, security.

Christopher Marlowe (Jack of Cups): Christopher Marlowe sits in a little room, holding a chalice full of wine. His blue-black doublet (with golden buttons) displays a crowned fish. A cipher manuscript sits in front of him, as does a twelve-penny dagger. A magic circle inadequately washed out decorates the plank floor. Three shadows surround Marlowe; behind him on the shelf is a grimoire and a Faustbook. Interpretation: haunted dreamer, broken destiny, occultism.

William Shakespeare (Knight of Cups): William Shakespeare stands on the stage of the Globe Theatre, with the constellations Aquarius and Pisces picked out in gilt on the blue-painted wooden panels overhead. Behind him is a stage hobby-horse; in his hands he holds the manuscript of a play and a quill pen. At his feet, unnoticed, a cup spills ink onto the stage. (In some decks, Marlowe and Shakespeare are identical in facial appearance.) Interpretation: studious messenger, youth, secret learning.

Walburga (Queen of Cups): A woman in pearl-seeded, fur-trimmed blue robes stands regally at the shore of the ocean. She wears a crescent crown, although the moon over her head is overwhelmingly large and full. In one hand she holds a net; in the other, a cup which overflows into the ocean. A large gray wolf-dog (a werewolf?) crouches at her feet. Interpretation: wisdom, emotional power, changeability.

John Dee (King of Cups): Dressed in scholar's robes and close cap, John Dee stands beneath a crown painted on the wall behind him. He gazes into a crystal stone; near it on the desk is a Grail of Celtic magic. Elsewhere in Dee's close, curtained library (for such this room is) are not only the anticipated books of magic but also maps and globes depicting the New World. A stuffed crocodile hangs in a murky corner. Interpretation: subtlety, secrecy, hidden power.

?

by Stephen Kenson

Art by andi jones

One of the problems of time-travel RPGs is the vast amount of freedom time travel gives the players. Their characters can not only go anywhere but any*when*; completely destroying the GM's planned adventure in a very short time indeed.

Most time-travel RPGs and settings deal with this problem by placing certain arbitrary limits on the nature of time-travel or on time-travel equipment used by the player characters. For example, the Stopwatch setting from **GURPS Time Travel** has certain "blank spots" in time where the player characters cannot travel, as well as the limits of being only able to travel into the past and having to travel at least 50 years pastward. Pacesetter's old **Timemaster** game made time-travel a limited proposition based on how much fuel the player characters' time machines could carry. The current UPN show *Seven Days* assumes time travelers can only be sent seven days into the past.

An interesting possibility for a time travel campaign comes from the "On This Day In History" columns that so often appear in newspapers. It assumes two things: First, it is only possible to travel into the past and return. Characters cannot travel into the future due to the existence of a "temporal barrier" or some other rubber-science explanation. Second, the travelers can only change the year they go to; the day and even time are the same as the present (maybe variable by only a few hours, but no more than six in either direction). When you travel into the past, you always show up on exactly the same date, only the year changes. Again the reason for this may be due to some unknown factor in the nature of time-travel, the motion of the Earth, the solar system, or the galaxy, or some similar effect.

So a time traveler departing from April 18, 2015, can go to April 18, 1775, or to April 18, 500 B.C., but not to April 20 of any year. Likewise, the same amount of time passes in the "absolute now" as the traveler spends in the past. So if you go back to April 18, 1775, and spend five days there, when you return it will be April 23, in the present as well.

Apply this idea to a time-travel campaign and you effectively narrow the options for travel on any particular day. In a time-war type setting, where two (or more) factions are struggling for control of history, this is an important tactical consideration. For the GM, it means that sources for historical adventures are no further away than the daily newspaper.

Let's look at the Associated Press' "Today in History" column from the April 18th issue of the local paper and see where and when a group of time travelers could go on that date:

April 18, 1775: Paul Revere began his famous ride from Charlestown to Lexington, Massachusetts, warning colonists of the arrival of British soldiers.

Travelers from an oppressive or Anglophile timeline (like Cornwallis from **GURPS Alternate Earths 2**) might want to prevent Revere's ride in order to alter the course of the Revolutionary War. The player characters might have to make sure Revere's ride goes as scheduled, even if it means one of them taking his place!

April 18, 1906: A massive earthquake struck San Francisco, causing raging fires and widespread damage. Some 700 people died as a result.

Was the San Francisco earthquake a natural event, or something engineered by time travelers? Perhaps it was the result of testing some new seismic or vibrational weapon. The quake and its subsequent devastation also provide excellent cover for other operations in and around San Francisco. Perhaps some of the people lost and believed dead were actually recruited to join the time-war. Saving the lives (or ensuring the deaths) of people caught in the quake may determine the destiny of the timeline.

April 18, 1942: Lt. Colonel James Doolittle and his air squadron from the *USS Hornet* raided Tokyo and other Japanese cities.

Thwarting Doolittle's raid on Japan would be a prime opportunity for time travelers looking to change the course of World War II in favor of the Axis powers (or possibly just the Japanese), a suitable goal for travelers from the Reich-5 timeline from *GURPS Alternate Earths*. Alternately, time travelers might be looking to *help* Doolittle and the Allies to do more damage to Japan and to end the war faster, perhaps by providing the American pilots with more advanced planes, weapons, or intelligence information.

April 18, 1945: American war correspondent Ernie Pyle was killed by Japanese gunfire on an island off the coast of Okinawa at the age of 44.

Was Pyle's death an actual historical event, or was it engineered because the wily and observant correspondent knew too much about something? Preventing Pyle's death could have various difficult to foresee effects on the American view of the events at the end of World War II, leading into the Cold War, perhaps influencing American journalism or reporting in some way. On the other hand, if Pyle *does* know something he shouldn't (perhaps something strange he figured out about Doolittle's raid three years earlier?) then it might be up to the player characters to ensure that he dies "on schedule."

April 18, 1946: The League of Nations was officially dissolved.

Day Tripping

How might things have gone differently if the League of Nations had not disbanded? Perhaps it might lead to a world like Gernsback from *GURPS Alternate Earths*, or it might have ensured World War III. It's questionable whether or not a group of time-travelers could have done anything to stop the disbanding of the League on this day, unless they had clear evidence that the disbanding was brought about by interference from other time travelers . . .

April 18, 1955: Albert Einstein died in Princeton, NJ.

The father of relativity and modern physics, Einstein would be a difficult recruit for a temporal agency to pass up. Perhaps time travelers recruited the real Einstein, leaving a lifeless clone behind? Or Einstein's matchless intellect might have been transferred into a storage medium like a braintape. Travelers could then create a new, younger clone body for him in the future (using a few cell samples taken from his original body) or to place his mind into a computer and create a super-intelligent ghostcomp. Who knows? Perhaps temporal agents are all braintaped clones of actual historical people, created shortly before (or after) their deaths. In this case, maybe someone could even *play* Professor Einstein's mind in a genetically engineered "super-soldier" body!

April 18, 1978: The United States senate voted 68-32 to turn the Panama Canal over to Panamanian control on Dec. 31, 1999.

Did somebody foresee the Y2K problem and decide that the last thing the U.S. government needed to deal with was control of the Panama Canal as well? Perhaps time travelers have an interest in preventing the Senate from making such concessions, in order to fan the fires of resentment against the United States in Central America, bringing about more terrorism and conflict in later years. Perhaps this leads to an American conquest of Central America, like that in *GURPS Cyberworld*.

April 18, 1983: A suicide bomber killed 62 people (including 17 Americans) at the US Embassy in Beirut.

Was the bombing of the Embassy a purely political incident or was there more to it? What if the bomber was actually a time-traveler willing to die in order to ensure that a particular person at the Embassy was killed? For that matter, what if time travelers prevent the terrorist from carrying out his fatal mission? Do the player characters go ahead and arrange a suicide bombing? And who's going to drive the truck?

April 18, 1989: Chinese students demanding democracy tried to storm the Communist Party headquarters in Beijing.

Time-travelers with foreknowledge of Tianamen Square may try to prevent the demonstrators from provoking the Chinese government, or they might try to help them achieve their goal. They could try and start a riot, secretly arming the protesters or sabotaging the Chinese army. Characters with more subtle powers of manipulation (such as psionics or mind affecting super-science) might try to "convince" the right people to accede to some of the protesters' demands, touching off a democratic revolution in China.

April 18, 1994: Former U.S. President Richard Nixon suffered a stroke at his Park Ridge, NJ home and was taken to New York Hospital where he died four days later.

Was Richard Nixon's death a natural occurrence or a cleverly planned assassination? Or could future medical technology help save Nixon's life, allowing him to continue to be involved in American politics. Perhaps he could play a key role in a political incident in the future the characters are aware of. Nixon's connection with China might link this event with events in 1989 and other time periods.

April 18, 1998: Northern Ireland's main Protestant party, the Ulster Unionists, approved a peace agreement.

Did time-travelers help ensure the peace agreement would happen in order to prepare Ireland and the United Kingdom for some future events? Alternately, Irish separatists might go back in order to sabotage the peace agreement and eliminate the "weak elements" from the Unionists so the struggle for independence could continue.

The same idea can apply to any day on the calendar. No matter what the date, *something* important probably happened on it at some point in history. Your next time travel adventure or campaign could be as close at hand as your local newspaper.

Local Heroes

by Spike Y Jones

Art by andi jones

In the average superhero campaign there seem to be only two classes of people: "supers" and "normals." Supers include all of the heroes and villains of the campaign world, and usually range in strength from the cosmically-powerful to those who can spend an entire comic book just to take out a gang of car thieves (this low end of the scale usually including the player characters). Normals include reporters, police, soldiers, thugs, innocent bystanders, the President and the dependents of the PCs.

But is there room in the world for someone who has a genuine superpower, but who falls short of the power-level of even the PCs? Sure; there's always a need for local heroes.

Local Boy Makes Good

In the comics, superheroes infest the biggest cities, being almost entirely restricted to New York City and Los Angeles (or fictional cities like Gotham or Metropolis), with occasional heroes in London, San Francisco and other major cities. In gaming, there's a bit more diversity, but usually only because a GM decides to set the campaign in the big city closest to him (e.g., Baltimore, Miami, or Toronto) instead of trying to fudge his way through the geography of some locale he's not familiar with. But realistically, superheroes and villains come into existence everywhere, not just in the big cities. Certainly, those big cities have larger populations to draw on, but there are still potential heroes anywhere there are people, and it might even be easier to gain superpowers outside of big cities since no one would be stupid enough to build an accident-prone nuclear reactor in the heart of Philadelphia. But putting it 90 miles away on Three-Mile Island would be perfectly safe . . . except maybe for those living in nearby Harrisburg.

Even if a hero gains his powers somewhere in Kansas, there are forces at work that may make him gravitate to the Big Apple. There may not be much crime to fight in a small town, and even fewer supervillains, and if he wants to make a name for himself he'll have to go where the opportunities are; web-slinging from grain silo to grain silo just isn't as exciting as the big-city version. And in a game, the player of a small-town hero will have to move him to the setting of the rest of the campaign if he wants to do anything at all!

But while all the first-string superheroes eventually make their ways to the big cities, the rest of the world is still likely to have its superheroes, as there are also forces at work to keep the minor superheroes who crop up in small town there where they were created. A small town will be inordinately proud of its super-son, considering his minor accomplishments more important than the major ones of any big city rival. The Incredible Hedgehog would just be one hero among many in New York (and a minor one at that), but in a small town he's likely to be the only super they have, and whether or not he actually does anything particularly "super" to justify their adulation, he'll be Grand Marshall of every parade, invited to every store opening, and the guest speaker at every retirement party. As for big city superheroes, the small-town populace will see any major hero who is proud of his own accomplishments as an overbearing lout.

While some heroes would trade in their "big fish in a small pond" status for the chance at real glory (as Razorback did

in *Spider-Man,* moving from the Deep South to New York city), many more would be content to stay with the known quantity (after all, who remembers Razorback?). Even if such a super were to go to a large city like New York to make a go of it, he could find himself with a recognition problem back home: "Weren't you the guy who was on the network news last night?" "No, that was Firebird. I'm Firehawk."

But these guys can be pretty spectacular in their own right; if they were the only superheroes in the world they'd have the fame and attention of the big boys. Unfortunately, if all you can do is fly, you'll be quickly eclipsed anywhere but your hometown by someone who can teleport up to a mile, shoot lasers from his eyes, and disintegrate iron with a wave of his hands.

Now That You're Here

There are lots of ways to use local heroes in a campaign. Sometimes a minor superhero makes only a single appearance, inspired to superhuman feats by the need to avert a catastrophe, and then immediately retiring to anonymity; the stereotypical example is the mother whose latent superstrength manifests when she has to pull her child out of a burning car, but who then hides her power out of fear or lack of interest in superheroics. This type of super can also be used as background, the sort of thing reported regularly on the evening news more as filler (in a world where the real supers stop speeding trains as a matter of course) than as important news. Mentioning news stories like this preceding or following reports of the exploits of the PCs ("And in other superheroics . . .") adds some color to a campaign.

One of these one-shot heroes could become important after the fact. If the PCs are fighting against a metahuman arsonist, any vaguely remembered hints of a fire-using, water-controlling, fire-proof, or cold-generating civilian super suddenly become significant, either as a suspect or as a potential temporary ally. An investigation of the one-shot hero would be necessary to determine that he wasn't the major villain they were after, but once they've been reassured of that fact, they can try to persuade the incipient super to become a costumed crimefighter full-time.

If the GM is the sort who grants lots of experience points to the PCs, he could start the PCs at the local hero level with every intention of increasing the power level of the campaign to the point that these starter characters eventually become the planet's premier defenders.

Or if the PCs are already powerful and established, an NPC local hero can be persuaded to join them as a mascot or sidekick, in which case he shouldn't just be a repository of extra powers and skills. The fact that this NPC once had a heroic career (at whatever level) independent of the PCs should be made significant. Minor villains from his past (possibly increased in power and anger) can come back to plague him. Occasionally, people who know of the local hero (but not necessarily the major heroes) can ask for autographs. And there should be occasional trips "back home" as a change of pace from regular adventures.

If the PCs treat their sidekick like any other sidekick (as a junior partner whose opinion counts for little, and who has no vote in group decisions) they will be in for a surprise. Unlike an inexperienced beginning super, the co-opted local hero has a past career he can return to, and maybe even some out-of-town contacts (like other superteams that didn't persuade him to leave his home) that can be used to teach the heroes some sort of lesson.

Mix and Match

The local hero doesn't have to be an NPC, even if the rest of the PCs are "full-power" supers. Still, playing a weaker PC among stronger ones could lead to a letdown for the local hero's player if the GM treats the adventure just like any other. The key to a scenario with a local hero added to the mix (whether he be PC or NPC) is that the adventure should in good measure be centered on that character. After all, if he wasn't important to the plot, why would he be there in the first place? With the low number of supers of any sort in a small town, it would be too much of a coincidence for there to be something going on in the area which requires the presence of a big-city superteam but which doesn't intimately involve the local hero, knowingly or not. In typical comic book style, the villain in such a scenario is likely to turn out to be the local hero's sister (jealous of the attention paid her brother) or the big-city villain

whose actions were responsible for the local hero gaining his powers in the first place.

Not only does such a mixed-power level adventure allow the player running the local hero an interesting challenge to play, but it gives the other players and character an unaccustomed moment out of the spotlight, both in matters of attention and of ability. In his own home town, the local hero has a "home field advantage"; he has area knowledge, a local reputation, and contacts that make him locally a bigger hero than the out-of-town ringers.

A League of Their Own

As an occasional break from high-powered superhero gaming (and an excellent diversion for a small group of players or a solo player), a group may want to experiment with a campaign revolving around the lives of some local heroes. A local heroes campaign has a higher ratio of secret ID to public ID events, but balances this lack of excitement with the difficulty that low-powered and inexperienced heroes have with "normal" superheroic tasks such as getting to the site of the action or capturing a runaway elephant. Local heroes could find themselves stuck with the consequences of the actions of regular heroes (e.g., that elephant could have escaped the zoo after a fight with a baddie damaged its cage), and setting their adventures in the same campaign as the group's regular characters will provide continuity and focus.

The difference between this and a campaign where the PCs all start at this level and then progress to cosmic levels, is that these heroes are low-powered in a world where the "real" superheroes are all high-powered . . . and the local heroes know it. If they want to make names for themselves, they'll have to work twice as hard as the big city heroes who were lucky enough to get all the breaks. They may also have to deal with the realization that they aren't the best choices for the task they face, but that circumstances make them the only people available at the right time and place; a heavy burden for the second string.

Made to Match

And if low-power superheroes can crop up anywhere in the campaign world, the same should be true of low-power supervillains.

Local villains, as it were, are rarer than local heroes. Not because of different incidents of occurrence, but because there are problems with being a low-powered villain that just don't seem to bother their heroic counterparts.

For example, a local hero can make a name for himself with a power as minor as The Snowman's ability to generate snow in summer. He'd never make the big leagues with a power like that, but with some luck and good PR he could take a break from his snow-making job in Aspen to make the local papers with the story of how he foiled a purse-snatching by making the fleeing felon slip on a suddenly-snowy sidewalk. But for a villain to make any use of this power, he'd have to be able to come up with a way to steal large amounts of money by snowing-up the sidewalks, and someone with that much imagination could probably make more money legitimately!

In addition, big city supers use the vast populations of the cities to provide them enough anonymity for their secret identities to work. In small towns, Secret IDs can be phenomenally hard to maintain, so many local heroes just do without. But if a villainous small-town gadgeteer creates a mole-mobile to drill into the bank vault from underground, everyone in town is going to know the directions to the local machine-making crackpot's house and the police might even get back to the villain's hideout before he does.

Still, there will be a certain number of supervillains who have their origins in the same small communities as local heroes do, and despite these difficulties, they do have roles to play in supers campaigns.

The most obvious is as adversaries for local heroes. Built on the same number of points, local villains are matched opponents for local heroes, and if the adventure features a group of minor heroes, which a collection of similar villains could be formed, a better idea would be to add a minor villain to a gang of street thugs, since the power levels involved here aren't as dissimilar as they'd be for thugs and major superheroes.

And while considered routine menaces by New York City police, even a minor villain able to come up with some sort of effective use of his powers is going to be a challenge for a party of player-character small-town policemen or just concerned citizens. It can't be said that the town will openly take pride in a supervillain in the same way as they would in a local hero, but privately, some small towns in a comic book world would welcome the appearance of a local supervillain, as that would prove that the town wasn't all that small after all.

While, as mentioned above, there are forces that function to keep a local hero in his small town, those same forces work to drive local villains out of town. So, while such a nascent supervillain may make his first appearance in such an out of the way place, he's likely to migrate toward the big cities when he can. If he should ever return to the small town (e.g., to settle old scores, because of some vital information concerning his origins, or because of an arrest and outstanding warrants), he's not likely to have remained unchanged by his experiences (and experience points). A villain who provides little more than comic-relief on his first appearance (Marvel's Paste-Pot Pete) can return each time a bit more effective until he joins the ranks of the true big city supervillains (the Trapster).

Some small-time villains will never make it to the big leagues, but they can still fill some of the same roles that local heroes do in higher-powered settings; they can be underlings for major supervillains or members of supervillain teams. And an underpowered villain who would pose no challenge to the entire PC superteam might be powerful enough (especially if his powers target the vulnerabilities of one of the heroes) to take on a single superhero separated from the rest of the party.

Power Levels

But what exactly defines a local hero (or villain). Aside from the in-character aspects of his career mentioned above, in an RPG there's also his actual power level. In *GURPS Supers,* an average normal has up to 65 points to spend (25 base + 40 in disadvantages), while a hero in a "realistic" *Supers* campaign (the lowest-level standard campaign) has 350 points (250 + 100). In *Champions,* "competent normals" can have a starting maximum of 100 points (50 base + 50 in disadvantages) while superheroes start at 250 (100 + 150). Local heroes are metahumans who fall between these two categories, averaging 208 (138 + 70) points in *GURPS* and 175 (75 + 100) in *Champions.*

This isn't a lot of points to spend on a superhero, so it's unlikely one will encounter a local hero with high characteristics or attributes, a dozen different powers (all of them strong enough to be useful), and good looks besides. Generally, a local hero will have to be a competent or talented normal with but a single relatively straightforward superpower to his name. After all, if he had a wide range of useful abilities at hand, he wouldn't be just a local hero.

Here is a sample local hero, ready to be added to any superhero campaign.

Firefighter

GURPS Stats

Appearance: Male human, white-American, age 32, 5'10", weight 165 lbs., brown hair, hazel eyes.

ST: 12 **IQ:** 10 **Speed:** 6.25
DX: 12 **HT:** 13 **Move:** 7

Advantages: Acute Hearing +1; Ally Group (other volunteer firefighters); Fearlessness +1; Reputation (Superhero, +3 in hometown).

Disadvantages: Dependents (wife and son, on a 6 or less); Duty (to people trapped in fires); Glory Hound.

Super Advantages: Temperature Tolerance (+20 degrees of heat tolerance).

Super-Powers and Super-Skills: Neutralize Fire-14(5) (Increased Area x 1 +20%, Costs 1 point of Fatigue per use -5%, Emergencies Only -30%) (on a skill roll, can be used for DR +2 vs. flame attacks).

Skills: Architecture-8; Area Knowledge (small town)-10; Axe/Mace-10; Brawling-11; Carpentry-11; Climbing-12; Construction-14; Driving (car)-12; Driving (firetruck)-10; First Aid-11; Hobby Skill (Artist; painter)-5; Jumping-12; Professional Skill (firefighter)-13; Running-13.

Quirks: Neglects his family and hobby for his new "career"; Never goes anywhere without his cellular phone, just in case; Follows the careers of other fire-based supers; Intends to make the leap into big-city superheroics in the near future.

Non-Super Equipment: (in car or pick-up truck; some GMs may want to charge Firefighter character points for this gear) -- Standard fireman's uniform (PD 1, DR 1) modified by addition of "FF" logo in reflective tape on front and back; Hard hat (PD 2, DR 2); cloth gloves (PD 1, DR 1); heavy boots (PD 2, DR 2); Oxygen tank and full-face mask; First aid kit; Access to common equipment on firetruck, such as fireaxes, hoses, heavy rescue gear.

Tony Filleti was just an average small-town construction worker until the day a house he was building caught on fire. While he was safely outside, he knew that some of his co-workers were trapped within, and taking only a few seconds to dump a cooler of water over himself, he ran into the flames to try rescue them. A few seconds later, he emerged from the smoke-filled building leading two electricians to safety.

Although he hadn't noticed it, some others at the building site had seen a strange thing happen as Tony ran into the building. The flames in his vicinity seemed to jump toward him before disappearing in puffs of smoke; by the time he came out of the building, the fire was out, although there was enough smoke to obscure that fact.

Tony was an instant hero, and the celebrity and the adrenalin rush made him eager to repeat his heroics. He immediately joined the local volunteer fire department. Although he performed other fire-department duties in the next year, it was some time before he had another chance to jump into a burning building, and this time even he noticed that the fire seemed to die around him; he wasn't just a hero, he was a superhero.

It's been a few years since that realization and Tony has been making the most of his new identity. He modified his firefighting gear into a costume and made sure that the fire departments of neighboring counties knew that his duties as the superhero Firefighter were available at a moment's notice.

Campaign Role

Obviously, Firefighter would be of use in any fight against a fire-using supervillain, although it must be remembered that Tony isn't immune to the effects of heat and smoke, nor can he rely on his superpowers to protect him from villains powerful enough to overwhelm his fire neutralizing capabilities.

While the PCs may hear about Firefighter as his self-promotion campaign spreads his fame (the GM will have to decide how close to the campaign city Tony's small-town home is), he can also be encountered at the scene of a natural disaster, or he may call them for help when he finds himself over his head against a menace that his powers are ill-equipped to deal with (but which his adoring public and overwhelming ego expect him to handle anyway).

And because Tony is new to the whole superhero business, he's a prime candidate for misunderstandings, as he attempts to save people from a fire-using supervillain (one of the PC heroes), or finds himself tricked into fighting alongside a real supervillain.

Firefighter

Champions stats

Value	Characteristic	Cost
13	STR	3
12	DEX	6
12	CON	4
12	BODY	4
10	INT	0
12	EGO	4
15	PRE	5
10	COM	0
5	PD	2
4	ED	0
3.1	SPD	9
5	REC	0
24	END	0
25	STUN	0

100	Disadvantages
20	Normal Characteristic Maxima
5	Reputation: Superhero, only in hometown 11-
10	Public ID
15	DNPC: Incompetent 8-
15	Psychological Limitation: Glory Hound, very common, moderate
10	Psychological Limitation: Duty to people trapped in fires, common, moderate

Cost	Powers	END
4	Enhanced Perception: Normal Hearing +2	
6	Perk: Contact (Other Volunteer Firemen) 11-	
5	Change Environment: Temperature Tolerance 1" radius	
13	Dispel 3d6 vs. All Fire (+2), No Conscious Control (-2), Area Affect, Increased Radius (+1 1/4)	4 END

1   +2 Energy Defense linked to Dispel (-1/2)

Skills
3   Climbing 11-
3   Combat Driving (Firetruck) 11-
1   Demolitions 8-
3   Paramedic 11-
10   Martial Arts: "Brawling"
     Offensive Strike
     Basic Strike
1   Weapon Familiarity: Axes/Maces/Picks
2   Area Knowledge: Small Town 11-
5   PS: Construction Worker 14-
4   PS: Volunteer Fireman 13-
0   Amateur Artist 8-

OCV: 4 **DCV:** 4 **ECV:** 4 **Phases:** 4, 8, 12

Costs: Char. 37 Powers 59 Total 96 Disadv. 75 Base 25

Bigger Isn't Always Better

So, while they'll never replace the mightiest superheroes on Earth, in either comic books or RPGs, the little guys who populate the background of the superhero world don't have to be mundane anymore. And with a bit of imagination on the part of GMs and players, a local hero can show a superpowered city-slicker a thing or two about being a hero.

Pyramid Review

Among the Clans: The Andorians

Published by Last Unicorn Games

By S. John Ross with Steven S. Long, Adam Dickstein

128 pages, $22.00

I know exactly what you're thinking, because I thought it too. "Andorians?
What's up with that?" After kicking off the *Alien Intelligence* series of *Star
Trek RPG* supplements with the excellent *The Way of Kolinahr: The Vulcans,* you'd expect the second volume to describe a race like the Betazoids or even the Ferengi -- not the Andorians. After all, how many times do we ever see one of these blue-skinned, antenna-headed aliens? Unless I'm mistaken, they appear only a couple of times in The Original Series and movies and fewer still in the later series. Consequently, skepticism will be a common state of mind upon first approaching this supplement.

However logical that skepticism might be initially, it ceases to be so after reading only a few pages into *Among the Clans.* The book's first chapter focuses on the history of the Andorians and does so beautifully. In my opinion, the history sections of alien books are often dry and unexciting, providing only a few snippets of genuinely gameable information. In most cases, I'd have preferred additional cultural details instead. This book avoids that pitfall by combining the two approaches, anchoring many elements of Andorian culture in their history. A good example is the place of kethni, or clans, in Andorian culture, which gets a solid treatment in the first chapter.

The second chapter describes Andoria at some length, providing plenty of information on its most important sites. Given that Andoria had already been well described in the *Planets of the UFP* sourcebook, my skepticism rose to the fore again. (Admittedly, *Planets of the UFP* describes 24th century Andoria, as opposed to the 23rd century version in this book, but I felt my concerns were still warranted.) While there is a certain amount of repetition, the bulk of the chapter is made up of new material. Throughout are details designed as adventure seeds, a nice addition to the text.

Next is a short chapter on the flora and fauna of Andoria, including the physiology of the Andorians themselves. While certainly useful, it didn't strike me as providing as many scenario ideas as the previous chapters and thus interested me less. The chapter that follows is quite the opposite. Detailing Andor sector and its worlds, this chapter offered up a multitude of ideas for *Star Trek* episodes. Seven planets and a nebula are described, each one interesting in its own right. This is precisely the sort of material I like to see in sourcebooks -- the building blocks of good scenarios.

A large chapter follows that describes Andorian life and culture. Topics as diverse as blood-bonds, entertainment, sports, and the Andorian love of secrets are given excellent treatment. As with so much in the book, it's hard not to see ready game uses for this material. Also detailed are Andorian religions. I've often enjoyed alien religions -- and these are some of the more interesting I've seen -- but I can't help but find their inclusion odd in a *Star Trek* supplement. *Star Trek* has always seemed rather atheistic in its general tenor, especially in its recent incarnations. At the same time, it's filled with lots of "deeply spiritual" aliens (but no humans). Taken in that light, I can't grumble too much about its inclusion. The chapter is rounded out with a very nice guide to "thinking in Andorian" and a list of important clans. All in all, this is the best chapter of the book.

A short chapter on the Andorian Defense Forces (including its unique starships) appears before another describing the mysterious Am Tal. The Am Tal is a conspiracy of Andorians looking out for their species' best interests. While

secretive, the Am Tal isn't necessarily anti-Federation -- although some outsiders fear it to be. The Am Tal is a useful plot device and could easily serve as the focus of several fascinating episodes. There are also chapters on the place of Andorians in Starfleet (as well as the all-Andorian starship, *U.F.S. Eagle*), dueling, and martial arts. These too provide plenty of meaty game-related information. Narrators and players alike will find them quite useful.

Unsurprisingly, there is a large chapter detailing new Andorian overlays, skills, advantages, and disadvantages. Lovers of optional material will find plenty to enjoy here. For myself, I found some of it tedious. This isn't an indictment of the writing or its contents. I simply mourn the straightforward simplicity character generation had before the advent of so many options and choices. However, I expect my opinion is in the minority. The final chapter is a nice introduction to the Andorian language, Graalen. Not only is the language nicely constructed -- consisting of consonantal clusters and vowel modifiers -- but it'll prove helpful in creating "authentic" Andorian words and names.

The book includes full-color fold-out maps of Andoria, its home system, and Andor sector, as well as seven Andorian NPCs, each of whom provides an adventure hook or two. The art throughout is serviceable. Few pieces stand out as exceptional and much of it is repeated from previously published supplements. This is a tendency I've noticed in LUG supplements, one I hope they'll cease as their lines mature. The book's cover is quite striking -- if only for the artist's conception of what William Shatner would look like as an Andorian.

Small complaints aside, *Among the Clans* is a fine addition to LUG's growing *Star Trek* line. I would recommend it highly to anyone seeking to add some depth to their Andorian characters. It's hardly essential, though, and some may find it a little esoteric for their tastes. The Andorians, after all, don't have the high profile of the Vulcans or the Klingons. As presented in this book, they're still very interesting and you may be surprised how easily they grow on you; I know I am.

-- *James David Maliszewski*

Pyramid Pick

Seed of the New Flesh

Published by **Atlas Games**

Written by Greg Stolze

128 pages, $19.95

Seed of the New Flesh is the latest sourcebook for *Feng Shui* and is a welcome addition to the growing line of products being published by the game's new publisher. Atlas Games has produced another fine book, which it should be proud of, though the book is not without a few flaws.

This installment of the *Feng Shui* saga details the world of 2056, which is controlled by the Architects of the Flesh. Experienced players will remember that this faction controls almost all the *chi* generating sites of the future, poaches the netherworld to provide raw material for their army of grotesque abominations, and has molded society in its own image. Players might well expect an Orwellian dystopia, complete with mind control and thought police, and they won't be disappointed. What they might not expect are the anti-grav pursuit vehicles, gravity beam weapons, orbital laser platforms, and state-regulated marriages. There are a lot of great concepts in this book, some of which will greatly enhance your campaign -- others are a little over the top. For instance, the Phallusaurus machine pistol, an automatic pistol with a ludicrous name and a five-foot clip which is featured in, of all things, a game show.

Odd jokes that I don't get aside, the tone of the book is very irreverent, perhaps overly so. Compared to other *Feng Shui* supplements produced by Daedalus, such as the excellent *Guiding Hand* book, this book's tone can be very distracting. Where most game supplements read like an encyclopedia, *Seed of the New Flesh* feels like a Mike Bullard monologue (sort of an edgy Canadian version of Conan O'Brien). The books' irreverent tone and exaggerated descriptions of future society might have been better suited to a Jammer sourcebook detailing the anarchist rebel faction than the no-nonsense Architects and their horrific minions. Personally I found the tone a little distracting, but that's just my opinion, and frankly, Stolze's tone makes the book far less of a dry read than it might otherwise be. Especially well done are the vignettes that introduce each chapter; the story of the three rebels does a wonderful job of giving the world of 2056 a unique character.

This future world is a twisted parody of our own, with all the spirit and joy sucked out of it and replaced with fear, paranoia and a police state mentality. The world is universally depressing, unsettling, and occasionally downright stomach turning -- an excellent place to game in. The book contains six chapters and two appendices which touch all the bases.

Chapter 1 provides an overview of the futuristic society, emphasizing how it is different from the world of 1996. Mundane topics like food and shelter are covered in an engaging manner, and six new archetypes are presented. Of particular note are the Criminal Mastermind and Uberkid archetypes that offer a wealth of plot options for GMs just by allowing your players to select them for their characters.

Chapter 2 begins with a well-written primer on 1996 for time-traveling architect agents. By emphasizing the future's view of our present, this little gem really puts you in the mindset of a 2056 consumer. Following this intro are a number of hooks for players wanting to flesh out their 2056 archetypes. There are a lot of neat ideas here that can enhance your campaign, but also a few that can destroy a serious game (believe me, I've destroyed a few in my day). All it takes is one smart-ass player using mc (the 2056 gender-neutral form of Mr. and Ms.) and I'm sure you can imagine what could happen to your campaign.

Chapter 3 is a tactical overview of the Buro's objectives and current operations. Written in the form of an operational briefing to the buropresident, this section is filled with more than enough dastardly plots and machinations to fuel any **Feng Shui** campaign, no matter what juncture it is set in. I was surprised that there was no coverage of the Architects' home era of 2056, but this oversight could easily be chalked up to the Buro's belief that it has eradicated all resistance in the future. Also absent was any serious mention of the Jammers and their activities. For a faction that plays such a large part in the card game and has operatives aware of and traveling to other junctures, you would think that they would deserve at least a mention in the sourcebook of their greatest enemies.

Chapter 4 is a catalog of things that can hurt you in the future. Not every item here is dedicated to causing tissue trauma; but then again what would the future be without the **Feng Shui** equivalent of lightsabers, tractor beams, transport tubes, and force fields. This section presents a lot of new technology, which is at once familiar yet unique. For instance, the antigravity crane is nothing more than a blue wrestling mat that either reverses or negates gravity. Most of the items are very powerful and not meant for player use, but rather to use *on* players. A Buro squad with variable mass weaponry and a temporal perception suppressor will ruin any PC's day.

Chapter 5 presents major NPCs that players and GMs will recognize from references in the main rulebook, along with a handful of assorted strength NPCs. Strangely enough, the stats for Desdemonia Deathangel differ from the same character which was originally printed in Daedalus' **Back For Seconds** book. Whether this is simply the writer's interpretation of the character or Atlas putting its own brand on the **Feng Shui** game is largely immaterial to the character herself, but interesting nonetheless. I have visions of a Gen Con event being stormed by a posse of Atlas Games rules lawyers intent upon breaking up the game for not using canon stats for the NPCs. This chapter also fleshes out the rank and file troops of the Buro, with an interesting assortment of creepy abominations and mundane troops. I would have liked to see more creatures, but the three presented are formidable adversaries.

Chapter 6 details ten important Feng Shui sites in the future. The sites are imaginative, and great settings to use during a campaign. I would have liked to see stats and advantages for each site, so that you could reward PCs if they actually managed to attune themselves to them. My favorite part of the entire book is in this chapter, the Museum of Abomination Research, containing such oddities as the blood squid and the Flying Bladder. I can't imagine a GM not using this site in a 2056 campaign; the creatures it contains are imaginative, horrific, and deadly -- which always makes a great combination. I really hope this museum somehow makes it into the **Shadowfist** card game so I add it to my Buro deck.

Appendix A is an adventure for beginning characters, called "The Cancer Factory." Once you get past the initial railroading, the adventure is pretty decent. Nothing too deadly, but also not very forgiving of PC mistakes, all in all a nice intro adventure, with the added bonus that PCs might even gain a **Feng Shui** site to attune to.

Appendix B is the second adventure, entitled "The Fist of Shiva." Compared to this adventure, "The Cancer Factory" is the **Feng Shui** equivalent of **Keep on the Borderlands**. This adventure is brutal and unforgiving. Not only do the PCs have to stop the Buro from ending life as we know it, but they have to unite all the other factions to do so. Politics are as important in this adventure as tactics and strategy. I was especially fond of the adventure's pacing, which accommodates almost every action the PCs could conceivably initiate. Not only that, but there are a number of ways that the PCs can simply delay the inevitable success of the Buro's master plan, without actually stopping it. I can see a campaign revolving around numerous PC attempts to end this threat before they realize that they can't stop the Buro without using a weapon of mass destruction to eliminate the objective of their plot. The adventure is definitely designed for high-end players with a number of game sessions under their belt and a firm grasp of the politics and tactics of the secret war. Anything less and the PCs won't stand a chance.

Overall, the book is a great addition to the **Feng Shui** game, and while it doesn't have the visual appeal of similar products released by Daedalus, it is with a publisher with a reputation for stability and quality work. I miss the lush covers and interior art of previous **Feng Shui** books, but I'd miss new supplements even more. The book is meaty and the writing style, while a little too chummy for my taste, is very engaging and quite witty. The chapter heading vignettes are quite evocative, with images such as, ". . . It's like they opened up my skull and scooped out the part that gives a damn," that are reminiscent of the best *noir* movies. I was a little perplexed by a couple of pages of art that didn't seem to fit the book, especially the map of Boatman's house and the full page art at the end of the book, neither

of which has anything (directly) to do with the book itself. Other than these relatively minor complaints, I would heartily recommend this book to any **Feng Shui** players.

-- Andrew J. Lucas

by I.T. Carlino

Art by [andi jones](#)

Who knew that a simple metallic sphere six inches in diameter could cause so much trouble? But now Kitchoff was dead and Brilla was being seriously questioned by the IISS Security Branch. Their ship was impounded and Gregor had a three-hundred thousand year old artifact that he couldn't keep and that he couldn't get rid of.

Kitchoff had said find a bar named the "Happy Spacer" or the "Glad Astronaut" or something like that. Gregor stepped into the "Cheerful Pioneer." He sat at the bar. When the barkeep came over Gregor traced the symbol Kitchoff had showed him on the bar. The barkeep silently motioned him through a door next to the bar.

Gregor felt the snub pistol in his side at the same time he felt his arms pinned by a tangler.

"Well stranger," he heard a cold voice say. "Now that you've found the Thieves Guild, explain why we shouldn't kill you."

GURPS Space calls it the Organization. **Star Trek** calls it the Orion Syndicate. Andre Norton named it the Thieves Guild, a title which has become a science fiction staple. This mysterious organization has inhabited many diverse backgrounds, from **Classic Traveller** to **Babylon 5.** Tell Players they are dealing with the Thieves Guild and chances are they already have some idea of what's going on. They know that they are dealing with an organized group that is outside the law. A criminal organization of interstellar proportions. A mysterious empire of illegal trafficking, eagerly sought by the forces of law and order.

How will your players deal with this vast interstellar cartel? Who are the members of this mysterious extralegal group?

Robin Hood or Al Capone?

First you must decide on the exact nature of the Thieves Guild in your campaign. Are they a group of honorable thieves, stealing from their victims, but leaving murder to the Assassin's Guild? Or are they a syndicate of Mafia-like hoods dealing in drug trafficking, gunrunning, prostitution, the black market, murder for hire, and anything else you can think of? Either extreme can make for an interesting addition to an adventure.

Honorable Thief

In a universe where the Thieves Guild is the Brother & Sisterhood of Skilled Practitioners, members of the guild will follow a strict code of honor. They will kill only as a last resort. They will keep the existence of the Guild, and their association with it, a closely held secret. Members will recognize each other with covert signs and secret

passwords. Membership in the guild will be a jealously guarded privilege, with only the most skillful thieves granted the prestige of the Master Thief title.

PCs might hire a member of the Guild to help with a special "recovery" assignment. Or a Master Thief might fill the role the Thief character has fulfilled in fantasy games since their inception, that of trap detection and lock picking. This thief has access to high tech devices, and his challenges come in an Ancient artifact site or an Imperial Naval Base. Sometimes it can be fun to throw a little dungeon crawling into an otherwise high tech campaign.

The Thieves Guild member is built using the standard Thief/Spy skills from *GURPS Basic,* p. 66. As noted, the Traps/12 skill is the same as Electronics (Security Systems). Add Computer Hacking (*GURPS Compendium I,* p. 160). The Thieves Guild is a Patron Advantage (20 pts). Members who are Master Thieves have, as far as other Guild members are concerned, a Status of 2. They can also have a dual reputation, which gives a +2 reaction to other underworld types and Guild wannabes, but -2 to ordinary citizens. Higher reputation can be bought, but will always be a dual reputation. The only mandatory disadvantage is Code of Honor (-10 pts), to the Thieves Code.

The Thieves Code: Never betray the secrets of the Guild. Never reveal their signs and passwords. Never give evidence against a fellow member. Kill only in self defense and as a last resort. A properly skillful thief will never have to kill to accomplish a successful theft.

Other disadvantages, such as Greed, Overconfidence or Kleptomania are also appropriate. Honesty is not.

The Company of Goodfellows

In this universe, the Guild is a massive parasite on the spacelanes. A Megacorp in everything but name, and in the commodities it trades. A vast array of PC and NPC types will populate the Guild. Cooked lawyers, thugs, assassins, thieves, executives are all involved in their heinous business. The PCs can be low level freelancers working for a Guild boss. Perhaps they're unknowing dupes, thrust into an underworld of which they are unaware. Or they can be brave Space Rangers, combating the corruption of the cartel.

Such a massive organization makes a good enemy. Perhaps the PC was an inside man who wanted out. Now the powerful Patron has become a dangerous enemy hunting him from system to system. Perhaps the PC was an innocent bystander, who now knows too much. The organization may be in competition with the PCs for a particular treasure or resource. Or the PCs may have something that the organization wants: That ancient artifact, that rare jewel, the plans to a special device.

Members of the Guild may be built using standard templates, to which are added a Patron advantage. Characters high in the organization may have Status, in some cases as high as an Imperial Noble. Even low-level characters will have a Reputation that will strike fear into the hearts or ordinary citizens (and intelligent PCs). The Patron advantage may extend to dependents and other family of Guild members, as the Guild takes care of its own, in more ways than one, if you talk to the wrong person.

Like a Megacorp, the Guild has a board of directors, the Dons, who rule their individual empires with an iron hand. They are aided by lieutenants who carry out orders and insulate the Don from the actual illegal activity. Like the Yakuza, the Guild is organized into families, adopting a relationship known as *oyabun-kobun* (father-role/child-role). The oyabun is the "father," providing advice, protection and help; the kobun is the "child," swearing unswerving loyalty and service whenever the oyabun needs it. In the ***Traveller*** setting, it can be said that the Guild is a distant descendant of Solomani criminal gangs.

Minidons rule the crime networks of individual worlds and systems. They don't deal in piracy; many of their products -- drugs, sex slaves, illegal tech, etc. -- travel on ships between systems. Piracy disrupts this traffic and causes the government to increase patrols.

If the central interstellar government is weak, then the Guild might actually own whole systems, and even have their own battle fleet. If the government is strong, with a cadre of Star Rangers, System Custom Services, and honest local police, the Guild might be a shadowy, underworld organization, preying on the weak and disenfranchised.

It Takes a Thief . . .

Both versions can be combined into one campaign. The Thieves Guild can be mortal enemies with the crueler Organization. The Honorable Thieves might despise the Organizational flunkies as beneath their station and seek to steal from the Organization at every turn, or even shut down it's activities. Or they might have to eke a living out of Organization leftovers, always aware that the big bad cartel could crush them whenever it wanted. PC's can be caught in the middle. They can attempt to aid the Honorable Thieves against the Organization. They can be law enforcement officers attempting to stop both groups.

The Manual for Life, 23rd Edition

by Loki Carbis

Art by [andi jones](#)

Despite its innocuous title, the *Manual for Life* is perhaps the most dangerous book in the world. Not in that the knowledge contained in it is dangerous to the reader, but in that its possession is perhaps more fiercely contested than that of any other book, ever. Unusually, there is only ever one copy of it in existence, and later editions are in fact more valuable than earlier ones.

Warehouse 23: The Manual for Life, 23rd Edition

The book was written by Samuel T. "Duke" Brunswick (currently lived 1909-present). It is a largish, handwritten book, expertly leatherbound, resembling a hand-made journal -- but it is truly one of a kind. Brunswick was an inventor of some note during the 1930s, although his fame was mostly restricted to those who knew of his devices -- a small group composed mostly of government agents. Like many scientists of his era, he was something of a polymath, equally at home in physics, chemistry, engineering or any of a dozen related fields. Brunswick had no formal qualifications for anything, due largely to his preference for solitary work. No doubt this preference is also responsible for his lack of knowledge of biology or medicine -- Brunswick disliked both nature and other people, although his elaborate good manners concealed the latter from all but those who knew him very well. The Duke (as he was named by an English journalist amused by Brunswick's aristocratic temperament) was a driven man, obsessed with doing things better and more efficiently.

As he neared the end of his life, he devised a workable means of time travel, although one that worked only for inanimate objects. After an initial period of dismay at what he saw as his failure, he realized that he had an unprecedented opportunity. He wrote down all of the scientific advances he and others had devised over the course of his lifetime, and a detailed account of his life, with particular attention to mistakes he had made and time he had wasted. And he used the device to send the book back in time, where it arrived on his younger self's bedside table one February morning in 1926.

At first, the arrival of the book puzzled the younger Brunswick. But it contained secrets that only he knew, and some predictions of the (to him) near future that soon came to pass, assuring Brunswick of the book's veracity. He set to work with renewed determination, able to advance upon discoveries he had already made, and thus the cycle began.

A work like this would have created quite a disruption in history if any word of it ever leaked out, and Brunswick, in his many versions, has been careful to avoid that, while still trying to direct the research of others to help make "discoveries" that he himself had already made.

At the current time (whatever that might mean), the Manual has gone missing from the laboratory of Dr. Brunswick, and is somewhere in the outside world. Its pages contain the equivalent of hundreds of years of scientific research and technological breakthroughs -- along with careful and easy to follow instructions of how to duplicate them starting from a 1909 level of science. The TLs of the devices in the book thus range from TL6 as far up as TL11. Realistically, just about any device in either volume of ***GURPS Ultra-Tech*** could be found in the book. (Due to Brunswick's

specialization in physical sciences and engineering, nothing from *GURPS Bio-Tech* is in the book.)

Adventure Seeds

Although the Manual could show up in nearly any setting, it is best suited to *GURPS Cliffhangers* and *GURPS Illuminati* games, with *GURPS Atomic Horror* falling somewhere between the two. In a pulp-style setting, Duke Brunswick might well be a pulp adventurer himself (although he would more likely be a patron or supporter of the characters, since he would hate to have his studies interrupted by anything). In a more modern, conspiratorial setting, he is likely thought of as a harmless crank by most of the establishment -- although if he cared to be one, his science would easily make him an excellent Secret Master. And the missing manual may well be lost somewhere in the depths of Warehouse 23.

Other variations include *GURPS Cyberpunk* or *GURPS Reign of Steel* -- just move the timeline up as many years as the campaign needs, and adjust the tech levels accordingly. Further out, the Manual could be a grimoire rather than a textbook in a *GURPS Fantasy* setting. (In *GURPS Technomancer,* it could well be both! And if Duke Brunswick existed in a *GURPS Mage: The Ascension* game, he'd certainly be a member of the Sons of Ether, and most likely on the run from the Technocracy.) And how about a *GURPS Alternate Earths* game where every time Brunswick sends the book back again, he creates another, ever-so-slightly different, alternate timeline? (To really make such a setting interesting, his devices would have to change history somehow -- most likely by altering the course of World War II.)

[*Author's Note:* "The Manual for Life" was inspired by R.A. Lafferty's brilliant short story "Rainbird" (unfortunately out of print), and to a lesser extent by another short story, Robert Heinlein's classic "By His Bootstraps."]

Pyramid Pick

Return To White Plume Mountain

Published by [TSR/Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bruce R. Cordell

64 Pages, $12.95

Part of TSR's 25th Anniversary Series, **Return to White Plume Mountain** is a
revisiting of one of the earliest modules released by TSR -- **S2: White Plume
Mountain** by Lawrence Schick. As the name implies, **The Return To . . .** series
revives some of the classic adventures that formed the shared history of many long-time **D&D**ers. The module is for 4
to 10 characters of 7th to 10th level, with a recommended minimum level total of 45.

The adventure consists of, essentially, a dungeon crawl. Appropriately so, since the original adventure was exactly
that; it concerned a party of adventurers tasked with penetrating the active volcano lair of the (vanished) arch-wizard
Keraptis to recover three powerful magic weapons. **Return** expands upon the scope of the original adventure -- four
false Kerapti, former servants of the wizard who each believe they are the archwizard, each hold a portion of the
tunnels under White Plume Mountain. It is the job of the PCs to recover the (now four) magic weapons of Keraptis
from these pretenders. The adventure gives the PCs opportunities to work with the various factions, but in the end it
still comes down to standard, alignment-based politics -- the factions are all ultimately evil and must be destroyed.
RTWPM does suffer what I consider the "normal" **AD&D** module flaws -- way too many magic items as treasure,
wandering monsters, and a plethora of monsters crammed into small tunnels.

RTWPM expands the limited tunnel system that was in the original module to provide a much larger scope for the
adventure. It also details other places on the mountain, with evocative names like Thingizzard's Hut, Dead Gnoll's Eye
Socket, and The Cursed Ruins of Castle Mukos. These were mentioned only in passing in the original module, and
they are important parts of the adventure. The maps are full color, with color-coded room numbers to note which areas
are controlled by which faction, without detracting from the attractiveness of the map.

GMs and players familiar with the original module are likely to enjoy this revisit. However, changes have been made.
The magic weapons of Keraptis -- the trident Wave, the hammer Whelm, and the sword Blackrazor have all had their
alignments changed to Neutral Evil. This may be to keep non-evil PCs from keeping and using these weapons. A
fourth weapon, Frostrazor, has been added. While powerful like the rest, it is somehow jarringly different and feels
like it was added in to pad out the number of factions, or perhaps provide a reward useful to a non-evil party. **RTWPM**
also has some assumptions about what has passed before, so a campaign that uses the plot of the original (or has PCs
who have completed the original adventure) may find that the new adventure does not quite fit without modifications.

RTWPM does have more than just the adventure itself -- seven new monsters, the weapons themselves, and some great
names for the false Kerapti (Killjoy and Mossmutter being my personal favorites). Monster text descriptions are boxed
and listed where they appear, but their actual game stats are listed in an appendix in the back. This can be frustrating -
- to use a monster you need to look up a description in the main text, and then statistics in the appendix.

The layout is decidedly odd -- the Table of Contents is practically a combination table of contents and index. Items are
listed more-or- less in page order, but not necessarily. The dungeon maps on the inside covers, and the wilderness map
and the PC's version of the wilderness map are not on facing pages. This results in a lot of page flipping to use the
adventure.

Overall, it is a little pricey at $13 for 64 pages, but the adventure is interesting. Despite the haphazard layout, the text-to-art ratio is high (and the art is good), and it is was worth the price to me. I personally bought it to adapt to **GURPS** and found little trouble doing so -- though a familiarity with either 1st or 2nd edition ***AD&D*** is probably necessary.

-- Peter V. Dell'Orto

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

The Final Second Sight

This is turning out to be a very difficult column to write.

It's pretty much the last thing I'm going to do for *Pyramid,* and finishing it will mean my tenure here is done. And for some reason, I'm having a little trouble coming to that point.

Change is something most people approach with some trepidation, and it's worse for me than for most people. I'm a real creature of habit, the "devil you know" sort. Change doesn't come easy. So here I am, resisting this final moment of the old, comfortable gig, dragging myself kicking and screaming into a new phase of my life and career.

But I had an outline in my head for this thing, so maybe the way to get over this procrastination is to just dive in . . .

The Past

I promised last week that I would talk about what we've done right in Pyramid's near-seven-year (so far) run, and that list is long and distinguished. But since I don't want to come off as overly self-serving (a little bit self-serving is OK, but I don't want to push it), I'll keep this short.

I'm very pleased with the sheer amount of material we've been able to present, especially online, where we put out the equivalent of a year's worth of paper *Pyramids* every six to eight weeks. And while not every single article was a five-star winner, we've done a lot of neat stuff, and on a number of different subjects.

We've covered the adventure game industry like nobody else. When *Pyramid* was a paper endeavor, our long lead times meant we did analysis pieces, long-view looks at trends and "big picture" sorts of subjects. Then, when we switched to the Internet, everything changed instantly. We became, thanks to the speed and immediacy of the net, a headline service. We broke story after story, before anybody else. And we were still able to offer our share of analysis and "big picture" stuff.

And, perhaps most importantly, we've built that much-to-be-hoped-for "online community" that most websites want. We've got chat rooms and message boards, and a group of subscribers that use them. These forums have their own character (and their own characters), and they have become a little extended family. I'm very pleased with that, and I don't see why it won't continue.

The Present

This is where I do all my thank yous. *Pyramid* wouldn't be anything at all without the dedicated, longsuffering, and frequently underpaid work of these people:

Derek Pearcy. It all started with him. He and Steve invented *Pyramid*; Derek put together the first three issues, and was instrumental in most of the other paper ones, doing all the graphic design and layout, and contributing tons of other material.

Steve Jackson. Of course. Never gave up on the idea of a game magazine, never gave up on the Internet. Never gave up on me, and gave me the freedom to put together the magazine I wanted to do.

Jackie Hamilton. Webmaster and programmer par excellence. There's a tremendous amount of behind-the-scenes programming that goes into all the nuts-and-bolts stuff that gets the magazine up on the web every week, and keeps the message boards running, and works the archives and the search engine, and handles advertising payment and placement, and subscription database management, and maintaining and generating email lists, and more. And none of this came in a box marked "GigantoCorp's Online Magazine Software." No, Jackie wrote it all herself, from scratch. And debugged and tweaked and fixed. And kept adding features, always looking for ways to offer more value and

make things work better. She's the best.

And I should mention **Keith Johnson,** who's done a great job as Assistant Webmaster, including doing all the dirty work of the weekly uploads and designing all the article headers for the past year, never being anything less than cheerful, timely, and competent. He's a real pro.

The Contributors. Writers, columnists, graphic designers, art directors, and artists, too many to count. And S. John Ross, who took over for a few months in late 1998 and carried the torch well. And a special thanks to our three newest columnists, Micah Jackson, Emily Dresner, and John Wick. Each and every one of them had a big part in this. That said, and with the fear that someone else might take offense by being left out, I must mention two special contributors:

Kenneth Hite. I simply stand in awe of this man's knowledge. What he knows, and more importantly, how his mind puts it together, is inspiring. And he's a tremendous writer. One of the best parts of this job was knowing I was the first person on the planet to read his latest "Suppressed Transmission" every week. Now, I just have to log on Friday morning and read it along with everyone else. It won't be quite the same, but it will still be fun. And I will still be in awe.

John Kovalic. How someone can be this talented and this funny, and at the same time also be one of the nicest, most forthright, most decent people I've ever met, is beyond me. John is an inspired cartoonist, a very good writer (though he's such a success at cartooning these days, there's not much time for mere words), and a truly funny guy with a great eye for a gag. If I had a nickel for every person who told me they subscribed (or resubscribed) to *Pyramid* just for "Murphy's Rules" or "Dork Tower," well, I couldn't exactly retire, but I could at least go out for a nice dinner with my wife. Thanks, John.

The Future

The future of *Pyramid* is Steven Marsh, just named editor. Next week will be his first issue, so be gentle. I hope he'll continue the things I've been doing that he likes, but I also hope that he feels free to change the things he thinks need changing. I hope he makes *Pyramid* his own, and I hope everyone is happy with the results.

One last Dreaded Slushpile Update: I got another 30 or so articles taken care of this week, but I must pass the reins with a way-too-high slushpile count of just over 90. You can start bugging Steven about it, now . . .

As for me, I'll be around. I plan to continue to read *Pyramid,* and I will probably make an appearance in the occasional chat or on the discussion boards. And since the current *Pyramid* readership is both gaming-savvy and Internet-wise, you will no doubt find out about my new projects soon enough. But like I said last week, it's not *Pyramid's* job to plug my new gig. There'll be plenty of time for that later.

It's been fun. And a privilege. Thanks.

-- Scott D. Haring

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Things To Do In Gaming When You're Dead

"But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear those ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?"
-- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* III:i

Is there any better way to start a story than with a mass death? Well, probably, but roleplaying game worlds being the high-fatality zones they are, and roleplayers being the heedless kamikazes that they can be, it's always good to be prepared. And if you can be so prepared, while at the same time throwing the characters for an enormous loop, well, that will just teach them to be more careful with the Semtex next time. The following, then are a quartet of possibilities for PCs in their afterlife. I've avoided the relatively obvious possibility of dragging out **GURPS Undead** and starting up an all-ghost campaign. It can be fun, but bright folk like you hardly need to read a whole column on the notion. For similar reasons, in games with a well-defined afterlife (such as the occasional fantasy game sunk more deeply than most into a cosmological narrative), you're probably better off sticking to the script. Conversely, if you intend the death or deaths to serve as heroic-tragic counterpoint (as in **Pendragon** perhaps), empirical evidence of the cosmos' uncaring nihilism (as in **Call of Cthulhu**), or simply as a really salutary lesson about keeping the red wire away from the blue one when you're scooping the aforementioned Semtex into some lucky bunker's air slit, well, feel free to let the PCs remain a noble memory or a smear on the countryside. But if you've been running a relatively "straight" game -- ideally, it seems to me, of relatively modern suspense, action, or conspiracy -- well, here are some notions for what lies across yon bourn.

"The Bodhi-dharma has left for the West."
-- Taoist saying

In Taoist legendry, when a sage like the Bodhi-dharma or Lao-tzu dies, he doesn't really die like you or I do. He "leaves for the West," traveling over the mountains to, well, an undiscovered country and so forth. This odd habit of leaving for the West encompasses most of your brighter pagan and post-pagan traditions, who notice pretty early that the sun sets there. Hence, the Celtic underworld Annwn and the paradisiacal Tir Nan Og lie to the west, as do the Field of Bulrushes (and all those necropoli) in Egyptian myth, and so on and so forth. But what's to stop you from assembling the newly-dead PCs at the mouth of a mountain pass with the rising sun behind them, describing the wide plain stretching forth ahead of them? One minute they're gleefully planning ad hoc urban renewal, and the next they're walking westward and brushing plastic explosive taggants out of their hair.

Make this journey as purely allegorical as you'd like. It can have the Ferryman, the Sword Bridge, the Cave, or any other archetypical spirit realm furniture you'd like. Or, it can resonate with echoes of your own campaign. If, say, they spent much of their career harassing Dynamic Aerospace, perhaps their primary foes (or allies) in the afterlife ride giant eagles, or bats, or pterodactyls. Corporate logos can recur in the heraldry of spectral knights; dead ringers (heh heh) for old mentors or sidekicks can show up as beggars, mysterious strangers, guides, or what have you. Get all your Epic Fantasy Quest juices flowing, although try to keep it to sort of "peripheral vision fantasy" unless you just want the poor PCs to die all over again, this time of cognitive dissonance. But, sure, throw in a Doomed Tower, a true princess, a magic sword, one ring, dark riders, the whole megillah. Just reinterpret those archetypes in terms of your earlier campaign (when the PCs were alive) and of the nature of your particular Western afterlife. Speaking of Westerns, of course, the mythic American West complete with ghost towns and gunslinging emissaries of death would make a fine environment for a properly evocative fantasy quest. So go West, young dead man.

"Kill them all; God will know His own."
-- Arnaud-Aimery, abbot of Cîteaux, at the siege of Bèziers (1209)

Of course, you can vastly increase the fantasy flavor of the postmortem experience by sending the PCs to Hell. Not, I hasten to add, Dante's or Milton's or any of them classy Hells. More like a bastard spawn of *Evil Dead III* and

Warhammer Hell; full of backstabbing orcs and spell-hurling demons and giant cannibalistic skeleton-monsters. Season it with oceans of flaming sulfur and a perpetually-lowering sky shooting luckless NPCs with the occasional azure lightning bolt. (For some reason, I'm flashing on *GURPS Myth* as providing the ideal flavor for this sort of afterworld.) The point of this campaign arc is for the PCs to carve out their little corner of Gehenna by might, menace, or Machiavellianism. How do a squad of recently-demised Black Ops deal with armies of goblins, demon lords, skull-headed fire-shooting liches, and giant castles of basalt? (Answer: recruit, kill, evade, and usurp, respectively.) If you've shown a tendency to overemphasize games of subtle research and stealthy infiltration, perhaps a little mayhem with bang-stick and bastard sword is just what the doctor ordered. (That would be the Malevolent Doctor G'krang, Lord of the Horde of the Sharpened Bones.) This is just the kind of Hell that always has a convenient portal opening back into the World of Flesh, although usually in some distressing era like the Hittite Empire, or post-holocaust Tennessee.

"Here patriots live, who, for their country's good,
In fighting fields, were prodigal of blood:
Priests of unblemish'd lives here make abode,
And poets worthy their inspiring god;
And searching wits, of more mechanic parts,
Who grac'd their age with new-invented arts..."
-- Virgil, *Aeneid,* Book VI

If you like your afterlife a little classier and a little clearer, try popping your recently-deceased party into a Virgilian Tartarus, peopled with the great heroes and worthy foes of the past. Again, this is a great place to put familiar figures from the "living" section of the campaign -- such as that archvillain the PCs finally killed after a year and a half of game play. *GURPS Riverworld,* either played straight or as an inspirational structure for your own fantasy milieu, is the sort of direction this passage points. Another is the *Heroes in Hell* series of shared-world novels and stories. You can have a lot of fun throwing your defunct party of *GURPS Illuminati* FBI agents up against Agamemnon's Myceneans, or Queen Elizabeth's floating court on the River of Tears. (This is the kind of setting where you can really get your nickel's worth out of the *GURPS Who's Who* books, too.) Or mix and match; Alexander the Great leads a mixed force of Comanches and Black Watch against the walls of Dis! Nikola Tesla tries to harness the Fire Falls of Eryx to power the industrial-alchemical plant of James Watt and Paracelsus! All while your players try to keep Skorzeny from assassinating Lorenzo de'Medici and throwing the whole balance of postmortem power out of whack.

"If these gatekeepers were not supplied the proper passwords by the human soul on its return journey to heaven, they would turn away a person and prevent that soul's progression to the upper realms. Without knowledge of the passwords, the soul, having a specific gravity, would be pulled into the rotation of the sphere to revolve there forever or until an amnesty was given. An unfit soul might be forced to pass through the body of the constellation Draco, reptilian Lord of Karma . . ."
-- Claire Watson, "Ritual for the Portal of Planetary Ascension"

Or, you can treat your party's death as the beginning of some High Strangeness Indeed. The always-reliably clothheaded Edgar Cayce served as the bridge between bizarre 19th-century spiritualism and vagrant 20th-century New Age theosophy when he postulated the notion of the "planetary sojourn." In Caycean mythopoeia, when you die, you travel "between lives" to the various planets, in what one can only hope is an unconscious steal from Dante's *Paradiso.* All you have to do is make it true. You can spackle the Bradburyesque jewel deserts of Mars or the Sargassos of fizz-water Venus with angels, the more weird and pacific class of dead person (Beethoven, Shakespeare, Marie Antoinette, and the rest of the past life crew), and lots of American Indians (who spiritualists all seemed to regard as Hermetic psychopomps through the Summer-Land beyond theVeil). This setting can drift more toward the "contactee" UFO mythos of a *GURPS Atomic Horror* complete with blonde aliens and metal spheres. Or, it can amp up the metaphysics a la C.S. Lewis' *Space Trilogy.* The important thing here is for every NPC to be really annoyingly calm and positive about the situation ("You've passed over, now; here in Summer-Land we need no food; your Aunt Mildred is here.") while you slowly drop hints that this might all be some kind of vast otherworldly Potemkin village.

Perhaps the kindly White-Robed Ones lead away the ghost of that nice French aristocrat when he tries to warn the PCs about something under the Crystal Gate of Mercury. Or perhaps they all fear the mysterious power of "Helena," and

the players discover that Summer-Land is at the mercy of a psychic madwoman who rules them with an iron mind in the name of the Hidden Mahatmas. Lots of puzzles and clues, like a particularly absinthe-ridden game of *Myst,* all pointing to purpose and construction. (If you simply must have combat, fencing might carry the right flavor; or archery. Or duels of flowers.) Once they've figured it all out, and forced things to a final confrontation, have the PCs wake up in a hospital. They miraculously survived the Semtex detonation, and they must have been delirious (or comatose) for the past week. But that's understandable, given everything they've been through. Why, if that nice Mrs. Helena hadn't made sure they got to the hospital, they might have died. Cue *Twilight Zone* music -- or the theme from *The Prisoner.* Imagine the fun, if the players suddenly fear that they *can't* die . . .

Reviews of Gameable Fiction

The Deryni Saga, by Katherine Kurtz

Review by Stephen Kenson

The Deryni live in a society that is much like that of the Middle Ages: kingdoms vie for control of land and wealth, ancient dynasties of royal blood rule the temporal world, while the Church oversees the spiritual well-being of the people. Most folk live humble lives as farmers and crafters in small towns and villages, while a small percentage lives in grand cities where the seats of power are located. Wars happen from time to time, but the people place their faith in the King, and in God, to deliver them from danger.

But the Deryni are not like other people. They are different, possessed of special gifts. Their powers are spoken of in legend, and people fear them for the magic they control. That fear has led to persecution, witch hunts, and oppression following the overthrow of a Deryni usurper and the restoration of the rightful line of human kings. Deryni struggle to right ancient wrongs and overcome the prejudice against them while using their powers for good, dealing with enemies from distant lands, and foes that stand very close indeed.

Such is the setting of Katherine Kurtz's series of fantasy novels, which currently spans four trilogies and a collection of short stories. Set in the kingdom of Gwynedd, the stories describe the struggles of heroes, both Deryni and human, over more than two-hundred years of history.

The History of Gwynedd

The human House of Haldane originally ruled the kingdom of Gwynedd. Generations before the beginning of Camber of Culdi, the Deryni House of Festil led a coup against the Haldanes and took the throne. With their magical powers, the Festilic Kings ruled Gwynedd, and became well known for their decadence and their cruelty. At the start of the story the young King Imre rules, along with his sister, Princess Ariella.

A close advisor to the royal court was Camber, Earl of Culdi, a renowned Deryni scholar and thinker, who left court when he felt he could do no more to restrain Imre's excesses. Members of Camber's family discover that a royal heir to the Haldane line has survived and is living as a cloistered monk. The Earl of Culdi and his family manage to restore the reluctant heir to his rightful throne, with the aid of the predominantly Deryni Order of St. Michael. The key to the restoration is a ritual Camber discovers for passing Deryni-like powers on to the human Cinhil. Although Imre dies, his sister Ariella escapes, carrying Imre's child, the fruit of their incestuous relationship.

The restored kingdom is not all that it should be. King Cinhil Haldane is a reluctant ruler, who longs for his old monastic life. His wife and queen is scarcely more than a teenager, and his first two sons are born sickly and malformed. More importantly, old hatreds and

prejudices against the Deryni, suppressed by the Festilic Kings, begin to surface once again. The Deryni practice of magic is called into question by the Church and secular authorities.

Camber fakes his own death to help quell some anti-Deryni sentiment from the King. He assumes the guise of one of Cinhil's advisors to continue to guide the kingdom. The "miraculous" events associated with Camber's "death" lead to him being declared a saint, despite his own best efforts to block the canonization. All the while, anti-Deryni sentiment grows amongst the human nobles and clergy.

Years later, Cinhil's death triggers an outbreak of violence against Deryni. With the king's heir only a child, a council of regents seizes control of the kingdom. The human-controlled council passes draconian laws preventing the Deryni from holding land, offices, or titles, and barring them from the priesthood. Many Deryni are killed and most others are driven underground, forced to hide their true natures. Camber's heirs and allies form the Camberian Council, a secret organization devoted to preserving the heritage of the Deryni and restoring Gwynedd to the control of the true Haldane kings rather than the regents.

Centuries later, at the start of Deryni Rising, the Haldane line is strong once again, but the Deryni have become a pale shadow of what they once were. Only a few Deryni are brave enough to exist openly. Deryni still influence the Torenthi kingdoms of the East, the land the House of Festil sprang from. Gwynedd's most famous Deryni is Alaric Anthony Morgan, the Duke of Corwyn, a friend to King Brion Haldane and mentor to Brion's fourteen year-old son Kelson.

Charissa, the Duchess of Tolan, and a descendant of Imre and Ariella, decides to lay claim to the throne of Gwynedd. She assassinates Brion using magic, and it is up to Morgan and his cousin Duncan to help Kelson gain the abilities he needs to fight the usurper in magical combat. Kelson must face challenges from would-be usurpers and rebels during his reign, while working to create peace and cooperation between humans and Deryni, and to reverse centuries of prejudice and mistrust.

The Deryni

Although they are considered a separate "race" by many, the Deryni appear human in all respects, and are capable of intermarriage with humans. They are set apart by their magical abilities, which are inborn, brought out and refined through training and experience.

Deryni powers are generally psychic in nature, things like telepathy, ESP, psychometry, and telekinesis. They also make use of ritual magic, trances, and meditation to work their spells. The ancient Deryni possessed even more powerful magic, including the ability to create "transfer portals" for teleportation across vast distances, and the ability to heal injuries and illnesses. Some of these abilities (like the secrets of portal creation) have been preserved by the Camberian Council, while others (like healing) are only being rediscovered in Kelson's time.

Deryni magic is rarely flashy or spectacular, tending towards the subtle. Deryni also need considerable concentration and training to use their abilities.

Deryni are vulnerable to a drug known as merasha, which neutralizes their abilities and makes them disoriented and nauseous. Their human (and even Deryni) foes used merasha as a weapon against the Deryni, one of the ways in which humans have been able to oppress the Deryni for centuries.

Deryni Campaigns

The Eleven Kingdoms offer numerous possibilities as a roleplaying setting. Players can take the roles of various nobles and worthies in the royal court of Gwynedd, for example. The

characters might be Deryni, human, or a mixed group. They can be nobles, knights, and even clergy. From Camber's daughter Evaine to Morgan's wife Richenda, women have a strong place in the Deryni saga. Deryni women like Ariella and Charissa are dangerous foes, as well.

Gamemasters can set a Deryni campaign during or just after Camber's restoration of the Haldane line, when human prejudice against Deryni is first beginning to surface; during the harrowing time of the Council of Ramos, when Deryni are being hunted down; in the long years before Kelson's reign; or after Kelson is crowned king and begins working to reconcile humans and Deryni. Political intrigues, quests, magical duels, secret societies, and other activities can fill the lives of the characters with adventure.

The *GURPS* rules can handle the Deryni quite well by treating most of their abilities as psionic. The ritual magic rules from *GURPS Voodoo* also fit the setting perfectly. Deryni in Gwynedd either have a Secret (for those who conceal their heritage), or a Social Stigma (for those who don't).

Another game system that would handle the world of the Deryni well is Chaosium's *Pendragon RPG*. With its Middle Ages flavor, system of Passions, and its mysterious magic, Pendragon suits the feel of the Deryni stories quite well. Gamemasters can also adapt nearly any other fantasy or generic RPG system to suit the setting of the Eleven Kingdoms.

The Deryni saga also provides useful information for GMs running a pseudo-historical fantasy campaign. A long-time member of the Society for Creative Anachronism, Ms. Kurtz excels in describing the courtly manners, heraldry, Church rituals, beliefs, and day-to-day life in the world of the Deryni. Her material on the Christian church alone is invaluable for a game setting like *Ars Magica*, or Yrth from *GURPS Fantasy*.

Sources

The current Deryni novels are (in chronological order): *The Legends of Camber of Culdi* (*Camber of Culdi*, *Saint Camber*, and *Camber the Heretic*), *The Heirs of St. Camber* (*The Harrowing of Gwynedd*, *King Javan's Year*, and *The Bastard Prince*), *The Chronicles of the Deryni* (*Deryni Rising*, *Deryni Checkmate*, and *High Deryni*), and *The Histories of King Kelson* (*The Bishop's Heir*, *The King's Justice*, and *The Quest for Saint Camber*). There is also a collection of Deryni short stories, entitled *The Deryni Archives*, all published by DelRey. Ms. Kurtz has also written an invaluable index and reference work entitled *Deryni Magic*, which provides considerable information for gamers interested in the history and abilities of the Deryni.

?

by Ralph Dula

Art by Art Today and Colored by Phil Reed

He should be a renowned hero of the Confederate States of America, the man who led the army that captured Santa Anna at The Battle of San Jacinto, and was president of the Republic of Texas from 1836 to 1838 and 1841 to 1844. Oh, they may have named a city after him, but in the Weird West one of his deeds earned him the eternal wrath of the entire CSA. It was not his years of living with the Cherokee Indians and his fervent support of Indian rights. Nor is his saving of Santa Anna from a lynching so that he would recognize the existence of the Free Republic of Texas what he is reviled for. No, Houston is remembered for his speech as governor when the rumblings of the War Between the States began, when Texas was called upon to take a side. "Your fathers and husbands, your sons and brothers, will be herded at the point of the bayonet . . . The North . . . will overwhelm the South." Perhaps even those words could have been forgiven, had he not resigned as governor rather than take an oath of allegiance to the Confederacy. He died in 1863, the year of the Reckoning; honored by some, scorned by most.

It was this scorn that stopped the Texas Rangers from investigating when Houston's body was stolen from its final resting place. When reports came in that someone was tracking down items from the Houston estate a few eyebrows were raised, but no action was taken by the already-overtaxed Rangers. It was only when a group of shamans from the Cherokee Indian tribe came to Texas that anyone paid attention. The shamans said that they had shared a vision, where the spirits told them that Houston's deeds had imbued that which he left behind with great power. Faster than you can say "cow pie" the hunt was on, with an unlikely team of Rangers and shamans hunting down the Black Magicians who were behind the grave-robbing and theft of Houston's personal effects. Once the smoke cleared the heroes learned that the magicians had already determined which of Houston's possessions had become relics, and sent them out west. What follows are the relics of Sam Houston.

Raven Feather

No relation to the madman who unleashed the manitous upon the world again, Houston earned the name of Raven, or Co-lo-neh, from the Cherokee Indians he lived with from the ages of fifteen through eighteen. Not only the name of a bird of honor, Co-lo-neh is the title given to a leader of war parties, a position Houston worked hard to earn. Few knew that Houston carried a feather from the bird he was named for.

Power: Whoever possess the Raven Feather gains the Kemosabe Edge when dealing with the Cherokee Indians. Additionally, the bearer gains a +1 bonus when making Leadership or Persuasion skill checks when dealing with Cherokee Indians.

Houston's Bullet

During the War of 1812 Houston fought under General Andrew Jackson himself, opposing the Creek Indians, who were allies of the British. Hours after being injured in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend Houston led a charge against a band of Creek holed up in an enclosed ravine, during which two bullets hit him in the right shoulder. The surgeon who worked on Houston after the battle removed only one of the lead balls, feeling Houston was sure to die and wishing to

spare him the agony of having the second bullet removed. Needless to say, Houston survived and carried the bullet in his shoulder until his dying day. The reason his body was stolen was to get the slug, which has become a relic.

Power: The bearer of Houston's Bullet may ignore all Wound Modifiers from any injuries he possesses.

Taint: None. Note, however, that the relic only negates penalties from wounds the bearer actually has. If hit by a hex or black magic that induced pain or otherwise caused a negative modifier for the character the bullet would provide no protection.

Houston's Cane

In 1831, while traveling with a delegation of Cherokee Indians to see President Jackson, Houston stopped at the Hermitage in Nashville, where he took a hickory sapling which he made into a cane. Weeks later in Washington Houston was accused of dishonesty by Ohio congressman William Stanberry, and when Houston next encountered the congressman he attacked him with his cane. Stanberry responded by pulling a pistol, but when he pressed the gun to Houston's chest and pulled the trigger it did not fire. Houston's then proceeded to disarm the man and beat him severely.

Power: The cane does STR+1D4 damage, and is a magical weapon that can harm beings immune to mundane weapons. More impressive is the fact that by spending Fate Chips the bearer of the cane can bring misfortune to those who would aim a gun at him.

White Chip: The shooter has a -4 penalty to his Shootin' roll.

Red Chip: The gun jams when the shooter fires at the bearer of Houston's Cane. It takes two hours and a Hard (9) Shootin'/Knowledge roll to fix.

Blue Chip: The gun being fired at the relic's bearer explodes! Roll the amount of damage a single shot from the gun (rerolling Aces as normal) would inflict, and apply the damage to the arm holding the gun. If using a two-handed gun such as rifle or shotgun apply the damage equally to both arms!

Taint: The Reckoners have been able to corrupt this relic due to its violent and ignoble history. The bearer gains the Bloodthirsty and Vengeful Hindrances.

A Note to the Marshall: The Black Magicians who uncovered Houston's relics were in the employ of one of the Aces of The Court (see *Hucksters & Hexes* for more on The Court). This manitou-bonded, Black Magic-wielding Huckster wished to have the power of the relics on her side, so that she might serve the Reckoners better. She has kept the knowledge of the relics' existence from her master, The Joker, as she knows he would claim them for himself. She is currently in Lost Angels, using it as a base to hunt down the most noble heroes of the Great Maze.

by John Karakash

Art by David Plunkett and Colored by Phil Reed

A staple in many genres is the 'Big Rubber Monster': a seemingly invulnerable enemy that the heroes can defeat only by courage, ingenuity and, perhaps, a little luck. Although BRMs are most frequent in superhero adventures or 50's monster movies (such as the world portrayed in *GURPS Atomic Horror*), there's no reason you can't inject them into any game.

Making your BRM

First, it should be **big**. Mind you, small rubber monsters are quite possible, but part of the terror is the sheer size of the creature. The scale of the challenge depends on the genre you are in, but it should dwarf anything the characters usually face. Emphasize its immensity in as much lurid detail you can manage. Lovingly describe how it can use the Empire State building as a backscratch and the spire on top as a toothpick. Whenever possible, compare it to something the players know the size of so they can be properly impressed.

Rubber describes the costumes actors wore when they tore apart scale models of downtown Tokyo, but in our case it's a keyword to indicate that the monster is seemingly invincible. Normal weapons should have little to no effect on the creature. In some cases, it might even make the thing stronger! Increasingly potent conventional weapons (and even unconventional ones) should bounce off, be absorbed, or merely annoy the critter. In extreme cases, it will not even **notice** that an attack has occurred. Throw a few dozen (or a few thousand) doomed NPCs at it to prove its invincibility. If the player characters can survive the pounding (such as in a superhero game) let them find out through direct experience. One caveat is that the players in superhero games get a bit stubborn once they are in battle. All you can do is emphasize the big rubber nature of the challenge and indicate that they still have a few hours before it gets to the next town, thus allowing them to retreat and regroup without feeling they are abandoning the fight.

Lastly, the creature should definitely be a **monster**. Have it wipe out a skyscraper or two, eat a small town, or destroy an entire planet. This highlights both its toughness, and its damage-dealing capabilities. Ensure that the players realize that, if unchecked, it can only become a greater threat. The monster should either be unintelligent, too alien to communicate with, or simply not open to negotiation. Very quickly, the PCs should figure out that the thing has to be destroyed for the common good (or their own personal survival for less-than-altruistic characters!).

Breaking your BRM

Okay, you have this huge, unstoppable abomination eating midwestern towns like potato chips; what can the characters do about it? Plenty . . . once you give it an appropriate **weakness**. There are a near infinite variety of weaknesses that can be divided into rough

categories depending on their essential nature.

Fatal Flaw

A certain substance, type of energy or other environmental effect can knock the monster flat. While acceptable for movies, this leaves a bad taste in the mouth of the players who actually want to *beat* the creature in a more satisfying fashion. Instead of holding up the green argonite meteorite and dissolving the rampaging hyper-amoeba with its radiation, the PCs can fashion weapons out of it (whether ray-beams or swords depends on the genre). This allows them to confront the creature directly and gives them a sense of vindication if they were frustrated by its unstoppable nature in prior encounters.

Hidden Defect

The monster has a chink in the armor that can be exploited. This can be anything from a literal hole in its defenses to a type of attack that it cannot defend against. Perhaps it cannot even *conceive* of how to defend against it. For example, the warbots of Zebulon might respond to anyone with a Zebulonic transponder as an ally and allow the heroes to make it to the reactor core of their mother brain.

Nemesis

Is there something just as tough as the creature that can be tricked or convinced to aid the PCs? Perhaps the cure is *worse* than the disease and careful balancing is required to make sure that they don't unwittingly bring about the doom they were trying to avoid! While fun, this also has the possibility of being less satisfying than a direct confrontation. So perhaps the characters' new ally is merely a distraction allowing the party to carry out their *real* plans.

Stoppable

What if the monster really is invulnerable? This doesn't mean it can't be stopped by other methods. Can it be trapped in the Cave of the Gods? Will a sufficiently large pentagram hold it? Perhaps the best solution is to divert it to the Great Nebula, or over to the Endless Sea. While not quite as heart-warming as whacking off the creature's head, it does leave open the possibility for sequels. The *Return of the Beast that Would Not Die* can be just as fun as the original adventure! Try to avoid using this too much, because it removes a very important sense of closure. Also, trapping the thing might be just a stopgap while the PCs work on a more permanent solution.

Using your BRM

First, introduce the monster to the PCs. This can be a direct encounter, legendary stories, news reports, etc. However it is done, you have to start hinting at its big, rubbery, monstery nature immediately. If their first knowledge of the beast is by direct encounter, however, you have to provide a way for the PCs to escape and leave no doubt in their minds that the creature can kill them!

Next is usually an investigatory phase. Either clues they pick up from research, from their encounters with the creature, or help from friendly NPCs can put them on the right track. This can occupy one or more game sessions or a variety of sub-quests to complete. Their plans should be formed at this time with at least a basic knowledge of what must be done. One thing to avoid is having a single, vital clue elude the players making the adventure fail early on. Nothing is more needlessly frustrating than to have action-oriented players stymied because the research phase is dragging on too long. If you don't want to just *give* them the answer, have an enemy of theirs offer the information 'for the common good,' but extract a price that will haunt them later. Or an NPC could die getting the information that the player characters failed to retrieve.

After this is the preparation for the big fight. The characters must organize their armies, allies or the weapons they will use. Especially in heroic adventures, this can take quite a bit time or may comprise the entire campaign!

Last of all is the 'final' encounter. Note that it is quite possible that their initial ideas will *not* work, and they will have to escape what they thought was the last battle and try again another day. Unless this is a horror campaign, however, the end of the beast should be definite and climactic.

To maximize the satisfaction of the players, it's best if the threat is credible (i.e. they know it's going to be tough), there must be a certain degree of frustration and fear when they realize that they can't tackle it directly, and everyone should feel involved and vindicated when the threat is finally put down. If your hacker is delivering the logic bomb that will cripple EvilMegaCorp, then your physical types should be fighting off mundane troops in a ferocious battle. Or if the formula to dissolve the SpaceGoo has to be injected by the Strapping Hero, throw in a curve where the Absent-Minded Scientist realizes that the creature has mutated and he has to drive through the caustic tentacles to deliver the new formula on time.

Also, do everything you can to make the PCs literally fear that they might die in the final encounter. Have important NPCs killed on the way to the conclusion. Throw new threats at them while they are dealing with the main one. In very gritty campaigns, you can even be liberal with maiming the heroes as long as they can persevere to the conclusion. The goal is to have the *players* out of their seat with tension and then ecstatic when they finally win. Describe the downfall of the beast in extravagant detail and let them lap up the praise and rewards from the populace (if appropriate). Give the PCs their moment in the sun; they earned it!

Examples of BRMs from Fiction

The Blob

It engulfed huge sections of a small town, it eventually succumbed to cold attacks, and it ate people. Definitely a Big Rubber Monster.

The Death Star

It's the size of a small moon, it only had one major weakness, and it destroyed planets. (The second Death Star had similar capabilities, but its weakness was that its shield generator was on the planet below.)

Smaug the Dragon

Big, mean, and was only killed by shooting a special arrow at one little missing scale on his belly.

The Borg

They had a galaxy-wide reputation and have destroyed entire civilizations comprising billions of people. Added to that, their weak spot was always different each time you meet them. Fearsome indeed!

Variations on a Theme

Big Monsters: Take out the rubber, but the leave the rest. With enough time and damage, the party can destroy the critter. This almost eliminates the investigatory and preparation phases and is common to both superhero and high-fantasy games. The trick is to *survive* the fight until the heroes do enough damage!

Rubber Monsters: Keep everything else, but remove the physical size component. The evil head of the Necromancer's guild who can only be destroyed by the touch of an innocent child or a suitable supervillain can fit in this category.

Big Rubber: What if the creature is simply misunderstood? Or is actually beneficial in some way? Some of the later incarnations of Godzilla and the giant worms in the Dune series fit here.

Avoiding the Monster: Some BRMs are truly unbeatable. The only way to stop them is to make sure that they never arrive. Most of the critters in *Call of Cthulhu* are this big and mean. If the heroes fail due to bad luck or poor decisions, you might want to arrange for some way to stop the monster, but at the cost of their own lives.

?

Ritual Psionics in GURPS

by Stephen Kenson

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Phil Reed

Isaac Bonewits' book *Authentic Thaumaturgy* describes the author's own views on fantasy and roleplaying magic, based largely on the use of innate psychic abilities, focused through certain rituals and the application of various magical laws. In *GURPS* terms, the system of "magic" Bonewits describes more closely resembles psionics rather than the standard magic system. However, the psionic abilities Bonewits describes are much more limited than the standard psionics rules, requiring considerable effort and focus. Standard *GURPS* psi powers are more like super-powers, always reliable (so long as you make your skill roll), and requiring no more effort than thought.

This system provides a setup similar to Bonewits', where psi powers exist, but are generally unreliable without the use of magical lore and rituals to focus them. The system is based on a new psionic limitation that encourages characters to use many of the trappings of magic to improve their psionic abilities.

Unfocused   *-75%*

Your psionic skills are in need of a focus of some kind, a ritual. You suffer a flat -15 penalty to effective skill applied before any active psionic skill roll! This makes active use of your psionic abilities extremely difficult, without the use of any sort of focus (and quite dangerous as well, considering the possibility of critical failures). Note this penalty does not affect "passive" skill rolls; those abilities work normally.

If the GM allows, characters can take differing levels of this limitation. The modifier is -5% per -1 to effective skill. Note that the lower the penalty, the fewer rituals required to compensate for it and the more characters begin to look like super-powered psis rather than psychics or ritual magicians. It also quickly increases the cost of psionic Power, which may make characters too expensive for the campaign setting. A reduced limitation can represent more "enlightened" (or powerful) psis who have overcome some (or all) of the limitations others operate under.

Focusing Techniques

How do psis with the Unfocused limitation overcome the tremendous difficulty in using psionic skills reliably? They make use of certain "focusing techniques" to enhance their concentration and create an altered state of consciousness, allowing them to more easily tap into the latent powers of the mind. These techniques are the familiar trappings of the magical arts and many psychic practioners.

When using a psionic skill, a character can choose to perform any combination of the techniques below, gaining the listed modifiers to effective skill. The character's effective skill can never be increased above the base skill level, the foci only serve the overcome the Unfocused penalty, they do not improve the character's chances beyond that.

Distance: Psi skills have a normal distance at which they function. Operating at a lesser distance makes the skill easier to use. For every halving of the skill's normal range, the character gets +1 to effective skill (up to +3). If he touches the subject, the character gets +4 (note this is in place of the normal +1 to skill for touching a subject on p. B167.)

Fatigue: A psi can spend additional fatigue to enhance the use of a skill. Each point of fatigue spent, in addition to the skill's normal fatigue cost, adds +1 to effective skill. Note the Extra Effort rules (p. B166) work normally for psis looking to increase power rather than skill.

Location: Consecrated areas are places where psychic energy flows more freely, unrestrained by the wrong "vibes". Most places are not consecrated, and offer no bonus. A character can perform a brief (1d minute) ritual to quickly consecrate an area, providing a +1 bonus. A true consecrated area (requiring a week's worth of rituals to prepare, and regular maintenance), gives a +2 bonus. A consecrated area at least 20 years old gives a +3 bonus, 50 years old +4, 100 years old +5, 500 years old +6, and ancient ritual sites over a thousand years old provide a +7 bonus. GMs can use **GURPS Places of Mystery** as a guide to ancient mystic and ritual sites, likely to be quite important in a setting with ritual psionics.

Materials: Psis can use various objects to enhance their connection to the target of a skill. A small object (like a piece of clothing) adds +1, fingernail or hair clippings add +2, photographs or blood samples add +3. Having the target physically present and in the psi's line of sight adds +4.

Symbols: Symbols of power help enhance the use of psi. A simple amulet, talisman, or the like adds +1 to skill, while more detailed symbols, created using the Symbol Drawing skill (p. CI147) add +1 for every 2 points the skill roll is made by, to a maximum of +3. Characters with the Mystic Symbol advantage (p. VO60) may add their bonus to their effective skill.

Rituals: Speaking words of power (mantras) and making certain gestures (mudras) can provide focus. A few soft words or a quick gesture with a couple fingers adds +1, both adds +2, speaking and gesturing clearly adds +3, while elaborate movements and loud incantations add +4.

Time: Activating a psi skill normally takes one second of concentration. For every doubling of the time required, the character gets +1 to effective skill, to a maximum of +5 (requiring 30 seconds of concentration). Alternately, the character can choose to prepare for a skill use by meditating, performing rituals, etc. Once prepared, the skill can be used immediately (with one second of concentration) and a bonus based on the preparation time. One minute is +2, 10 minutes is +3, an hour is +4, and a full 8-hour day of preparation is +5.

Examples of Ritual Psi Use

Mr. Black, mystic detective, wants to locate a kidnap victim using Telescan. He has Telepathy Power 16 with the Unfocused limitation and a Telescan-15. He also has a small lock of the girl's hair (+2). Mr. Black goes to the back room in his office, which he uses a ritual space (consecrated ground, +2). He performs a 10 minute centering ritual to prepare himself (+3), then lights some incense and concentrates on the hair, chanting and weaving gestures through the smoke (+3), he does so for a full 30 seconds (+5), then reaches out for the girl. The various rituals provide a bonus of +15, enough to overcome the skill modifier and allow Mr. Black to roll against his normal skill.

Mrs. White wants to heal an injured friend. He's been shot and is down to 6 HT (from 11). She has Healing Power-8 and a Healing-13. She performs the ritual in her house, which is consecrated ground (+2), using some herbs she's gathered (a symbol, +1). She can also see the subject as she works on him (+4). She works quickly, taking about

10 seconds (+3), and humming a soothing song while she weaves symbols through the air and sprinkles herbs (+3). Mrs. White gets no bonus for touching her subject, since the Healing skill has no range. Her total bonus is 13, leaving her with only a -2 modifier, making her effective skill 11. She decides to put a little more omph behind it and spends 2 fatigue, making the modifier +0. She rolls against her normal skill and succeeds, healing 5 hits and spending another 2 fatigue.

Ms. Gray needs to fend off a serial killer she's been tracking. She has Telepathy Power 12 and Mental Blow-15. The killer is close at hand, well within a quarter of her normal range (+3), and Ms. Gray can see him clearly (+4), she's wearing an amulet, and concentrates on it (+1), then levels a finger at the oncoming killer and speaks a word of power (+2). She doesn't have the luxury of time for any other rituals, so she also spends an additional 3 fatigue, on top of the 1 fatigue Mental Blow requires. That makes the final modifier a -2 and her effective skill a 13. Better hope it's enough.

Campaigns

The basic ritual psi system presented here can work in pretty much any setting that accommodates magic or psionic powers. Overall, the system tends to encourage subtle power use with a fair amount of preparation time and planning, or short bursts of power that leave the user exhausted, not unlike many fantasy magic systems. It tends to be better suited for settings where magic is expected to work similar to how modern occultists and neo-pagans (like Isaac Bonewits) believe it works.

Fantasy: Ritual psi can serve as an alternate form of magic in a fantasy world like Yrth, from *GURPS Fantasy*. The modification from the Unfocused limitation makes psi nearly as affordable as magic, and psis still need fewer skills compared to the average mage. There will certainly be those interested in finding out more about this "new" form of magic, and there will likely be "wizards" on both sides of the fence looking to suppress the rival form of magic, while others seek to learn both! Psi abilities could certainly revolutionize things in Low Mana Caithness, for example, which relies on its magic-poor nature to protect it from the fearsome sorcerers of Megalos.

Alternately, ritual psionics could be the only form of "magic" in a fantasy game. This is particularly well suited to alternate historical games, as well as modern "urban fantasy," where magic and psychic phenomena tend to blend together. The system could be a type of alternate initiation in *GURPS Voodoo*, similar to (but not the same as) the ritual magic used by initiates. It also works well for modern *Cliffhangers*, *Horror* or *Illuminati* campaigns where magic needs a "scientific" basis (or, at least, some scientific trappings). Researchers can say "magic is just a form a psi" and they're right! *GURPS Y2K* suggests psi might become a "magic system" for certain types of post-holocaust settings, and ritual psionics helps to keep such abilities subtle and mysterious.

Science Fiction: Science fiction settings often include psionic abilities, and ritual psi allows the GM to "tone down" psionics without limiting power or skill levels as much. It also permits the inclusion of "magic" in an otherwise technological setting. For example, the GM can set up primitive worlds where psis are considered "witches" and "magicians." Psis in the ***GURPS Traveller*** universe, especially those who are untrained or were trained at an eccentric psionic insititute, might have the Unfocused limitation. Functional psionic abilities might be brought out by alien intervention, genetic engineering, cybernetics, or industrial accidents.

Cyberpunk: A cyberpunk setting like ***GURPS Cyberworld*** might feature ritual psi abilities, sought after by the government and the korps, and used by punks on the street. A "psionic revolution" can turn a cyberpunk world into something similar to FASA's ***Shadowrun***. The GM can focus on the psionic technology (particularly biotech and implants) from ***GURPS Psionics***, combined with the Unfocused limitation and focusing techniques. Perhaps the first generation of psis needs a lot of rituals, but later "upgrades" continues to get more and more proficient, eventually building towards super-psis with complete control over their powers (shades of the classic anime *Akira*).

CthulhuPunk: Ritual psi abilities (particularly ESP and Telepathy) fit well into the ***GURPS CthulhuPunk*** setting, since they make the powers less accessible and reliable, and more mysterious. They also help keep the cost down, allowing characters to have a single power (or even a couple powers) without breaking the point bank.

Black Ops: The setting in ***GURPS Black Ops*** already assumes that all "magic" is really just psi. PsiOps are very likely to have the Unfocused limitation, cutting the cost of their powers and making them more subtle, particularly when compared to the full-blown psi abilities of rogues like the Lodge or Mind. Lower-level psis in those organizations might also require focusing techniques, until they are initiated into the secrets of the inner orders and their minds are "opened up" to their full potential.

Alternate Earths: Psionic abilities are known on some parallel Earths of the "Infinite Worlds" setting. Ritual psi could be a tool in the arsenal of Infinity Unlimited or the Centrum (or both). It fits in just fine on Ming-3 and Midgard from ***GURPS Alternate Earths 2***. It could also show up on Shikoku-Mon or Reich-5 from ***GURPS Alternate Earths***. GMs can even apply the Unfocused limitation to the World Jumper advantage from ***GURPS Time Travel***, forcing psionic world jumpers to use different focus techniques to help them reach other parallel worlds. For example, "consecrated ground" may be places where the barriers between worlds are the thinnest, making ancient ruins and neolithic sites major "way stations" for world-jumping travelers.

The Living City

(Note: If you do not have a consistent setting in your game, this month's column will not help you in any way, shape or form. Don't read it. It will not help your campaign. There's nothing to learn here. Move along.)

A common Game Master trap lies in designing setting. Many GMs think they have to spend hours, weeks, months getting to know every cobblestone, every brick, every face in the crowd. Well, I'm here to tell you that's a load of horse hockey. This month, I'm letting you in on some nifty little tricks that will make your environment come alive for your players in ways they (and you) never thought possible.

I can already hear you saying, "Hey, isn't this supposed to be a column about dirty, underhanded Game Master tricks? How is designing an environment low-down and nasty?"

I'll tell you.

Your players are gonna do all the work.

* * *

"The Living City" is a term one of the players used to describe the city of my long-running **Vampire** game. New Jerusalem was indeed a living, breathing city. It was awake even when the players were asleep. Plots were born, lived and died without the players ever knowing what was going on. Monumental changes occurred while they wasted time in the nightclub picking up the evening's meal. They never found out about most of those changes and events until it was too late to do anything about it. But then again, that's when heroes really shine, isn't it: when everyone else thinks it's too late?

The best part about New Jerusalem is how little work I put into it. I mean, I did a *little* pre-game work, had myself an outline, knew the names of all the important people (living, dead and undead) in the city, and I knew what I *wanted* to happen, but everything else was up to the players. *They* were the ones who really made the city come alive. And here's how I let them do it.

The City in a Box

The first thing I did was get a bunch of index cards and a box to hold them in. I also got little dividers to separate them out. I had a section for NPCs, Magic Items, Important Places, Events and Other Notes.

NPCs

First off, I didn't spend a lot of time on designing NPCs. I had an idea of how each one was going to be, but I really didn't want to invest a lot of time in building their personalities (you'll see why in a minute). I gave each one only three stats: Fighting, Thinking and Talking. I rated each one with a number, telling how many dice he'd roll for each situation. This works really well for Storyteller games, but with a little ingenuity, you can make it work out for just about any system. Then, at the bottom of each NPC card, I wrote three words (or phrases) that reminded me what made the NPC distinct when I played them.

So an NPC card looked something like this:

```
CARTER, JEFFERSON
Fighting: 2
Thinking: 6
Talking: 6
Home: 10258 Manzanita Court, (712) 555-5435
```

```
Goals: Control the City at all Costs
Resources: You name it
```

Then, at the beginning of the game, after I read all their character sheets and knew the kinds of characters they wanted to play, I assigned them NPCs to play as well. I gave them each an envelope with a copy of the card and a list of objectives for the evening. The envelope also contained information on where the NPC was that night, so if the players wandered into the Taboo nightclub, my buddy Ian knew that Donny Vanucci would *also* be there. If Donny got involved with the players, I'd take over Ian's character until they were done with him, then Ian got hold of his character again.

(Here's how I made it work. I usually have players wearing name tags so they don't have to look up the character names. As soon it's time for one of the players to take a different role, I stand next to them and put my hand on their shoulder. I take off their name badge and give them the new one. Then, I put on their name badge. As soon as the scene changes, I give them their badge back and take the old one.)

Players also got to play NPCs when their own character wasn't involved in a scene. For example, the players are in Taboo, talking with Jocasta, the regent of the Brujah. Meanwhile, across town, the Tremere are talking about how to deal with that miserable group of 13th Gen losers who keep making trouble for them (that's the players, by the way). I'm playing the role of the Tremere regent and Eric's playing his chief lieutenant. At some point, the butler (played on cue by Ian who was notified to step in by his note for the evening) informs us that the regent of the Toreador was here to see us. *She* was played by the lovely and talented Elizabeth who plays the role of a southern belle to the hilt. She lets us both know that one of the 13th Gen losers has something that belongs to her, and she is willing to do just about anything to get it back.

Events

"Miracle: The poor man's coincidence." - The Tao of Zen Nihilism

This little technique offered me a whole lot of advantages. First, I didn't have to come up with a personality for each and every damn NPC in the city: the players took care of that for me. From the Prince of the city right down to "Mean Mr. Mathers," the rottenest Math professor on the college campus (the *only* man on campus who ate the split pea soup in the cafeteria, I might add), they populated the city with colorful characters that would have *never* occurred to me.

Second, the players were no longer lone individuals; they were a part of the city. Each NPC they played gave them another investment in the events that occurred around them. Ian was playing Daniel Hayden, the bad-ass Brujah, but he was also playing the Toreador who *might* have been Oscar Wilde. Mike was playing Aristotle Jones (*all* the Malkavians were named "Jones"), but he was also playing Tori the Nosferatu who took care of the thing in the sewers they called "Mother."

Lastly, the players got to look at the city in a way individuals cannot. They saw what other clans were up to, but more importantly, they saw the consequences of those actions. They saw that one single event could change the lives of hundreds of people. Things were moving all the time. The players got a real sense that they were organs in a larger organism. Not only did they see others' actions take effect on their own lives, but they saw their own actions take effect on the lives of others. In short, they learned that there's no such thing as an "isolated incident."

Convincing players to give up control of their own character so they can play the Prince of the City/Evil Wizard-Emperor/Cyber-Dragon Mafia Boss is easy. Convincing yourself to give up control of your campaign… now *that's* the hard part. You've got to be willing to surrender your best NPCs to the whims of someone else. In order to do that, you've got to swallow a little bit of pride and have some faith in your players. Of course, you've also got to make sure you assign the *right* NPCs. Giving someone the *wrong* NPC can be disastrous. But then again, sometimes, it might be the best thing to do.

I had a player who was the God-King of comedy roleplaying. The guy was an improvisational genius, always hitting the group with off-centered humor that would make Steven Wright look twice. In the **Vampire** game, I always gave

him Malkavians to play, a fact that made our nutjobs both humorous and dangerous. But one day, I decided to have him play the quick-witted Toreador assassin, Jack. "Jumping Jack Flash" was a deadly serious Englishman who looked like a sinister version of 007. When Bill got a hold of Jack Flash, he slunk into a brilliant Sean Connery impersonation that was absolutely perfect. He accommodated himself to the role, flexing his roleplaying muscles a bit more than he had before.

It was a double-edged victory. I got a Jack that was what I wanted plus a whole lot more, and Bill got to stretch his roleplaying skills in a direction he never counted on.

Improvisational Environment

I talked a little bit about this in the *7th Sea GM Book* and *Robin Laws* also invokes it in *Fung Shui*. It's all about getting the players to *use* the environment around them.

GM: You're in a bar fight.

PLAYER 1: I grab a bottle of whiskey and smash it over a guy's head.

PLAYER 2: I grab the candle on the table and shove it into another guy's eye.

PLAYER 3: I grab a log out of the fireplace and smash another guy over the head with it.

You get the idea. You never *said* all those things were in the bar, but then again, they *make sense* to be in the bar, right? Why penalize a player for being creative?

But don't let this technique stop at bar fights. Just as your players can help you populate your city, so can they help you decorate it.

Some of the best parts of New Jerusalem came from my players. Remember Mean Mr. Mathers? I didn't create him, one of my players did. They were standing in the college campus cafeteria and one of them said, "And there's Mean Mr. Mathers over there, eating pea soup." Then, another one chimed in. "He's the *only* one who eats the pea soup." It was brilliant and I let it stick.

Once the players got the feel for it, they started decorating the city every chance they got. They invented a comic book shop and the crooked owner who cheats kids out of their valuable books (years later, I found myself wondering how he'd do with *Magic* cards). They invented the volunteer fire chief, the city librarian, and nearly all the police. And all the while, I was writing it all down on index cards, shoving them into my little box for future use.

Of course, I had complete veto power, but after a few weeks, I didn't need to use it. The players got a hold on the kind of stuff I liked and didn't like, but even then, they'd come up with something so creative, I'd have to let it in the city limits. While the standing rule was the player who created the NPC got first dibs on playing him, we did more than our share of grogging the locals (see *Ars Magica* for details).

Conclusion

Maximum effect for minimum effort. *(Slack!)* That's what we're gunning for here. I know a lot of you complain that you don't have time to run games anymore. I know you say you're too busy to come up with creative ways to confront your players. Well, this month you got a non-confrontational way to challenge them: let them use those brains of theirs for something other than counting experience points.

If you let them in on the Big Game, if you let them have a whack at creating NPCs and even give them a chance to plot against *themselves* (I always loved that bit), maybe they'll appreciate all the hard work that goes into running a game.

And maybe -- just maybe -- I'll figure out a way to show *you* all the hard work that goes into *designing* one.

Pyramid Pick

Priest's Spell Compendium Volume Three

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Developed and edited by Jon Pickens

286 pages, $24.95

If this were merely the last collection of Priest's spells from various sources, it wouldn't
need a review. Everyone would know that this entire book contained a listing of spells
done alphabetically from Spike Growth to Zone of Truth. Oh certainly, the various symbols that denote setting are
helpful. Of course the introduction and the brief definitions of the various schools are nice, but still, twenty-five
dollars for a mere listing of spells is a bit high of a price. The appendices, however, make this a must have volume for
anyone who ever wants to play a cleric or specialty priest.

The Spell Appendices cover the range from the very powerful Quest Spells to the more mundane Orisons. Those who
want even more power than the Quest spells provide can use the spells that deal with Psionic Enchantments, spells
ranging from 8th to 10th level. Fans of the *Dark Sun* setting will remember these. The rules for using such spells, as
well as an extended cleric spell casting list are included for ease of use. The list of Orisons includes not only all those
found in old *Dragon* issues, such as the Druid Orisons, but brand new ones like Handfire, and Incense. Lastly, some
may have noticed that there have been no spells for the Sphere of War. Because these spells tend to rely on the
Battlesystem miniature rules, they have given their own section and are complete.

The text appendices gives GMs who've never owned the *Tome of Magic* advice on how to handle and use Quest spells
in the campaign. In addition, Faith Magic, Cooperative Magic, Divine Intervention and Divine Ascension are all given
a brief ruling. Old fans of the old *Deities and Demigods* will recognize this table from page nine of that old tome. If
you're doing work directly on behalf of your deity and being opposed by opponents who are opposite of your Power,
there is a 26% chance of getting some type of aid. Not bad! The material on Divine Ascension is very brief and GM's
considering it should look if over, then search for the out of print *Primal Order* series.

The appendices not only break up the spells by sphere, but also by setting. This is a lifesaver for those like myself who
enjoy the more esoteric settings like *Red Steel* and *Spelljammer*. In addition, those who enjoy *Birthright*, *Dark Sun*,
Oriental Adventurers, *Planescape*, and other official TSR settings will benefit from this listing. Because of their large
number, there is also a section on spells that are appropriate to a "Savage" or barbaric setting. Another setting that
hasn't received much official attention, the Vedic or Indian setting, is also covered.

Outside of the setting break down, demihuman lists (including dwarf, elf, drow, gnome, and halfling) also separate the
spells. A general listing of nonhuman priests spells finishes off the demihuman list. Included, but not limited to, are
priest spells for beholders, sea elves, sahuain, yuan-ti, and even dragons.

Those who remember the old favorites cleric-based classes from *Dragon Magazine* like the Cloistered Priests, Savants,
Oracles, and Shamans can rejoice as their spell lists are all given attention. Not only are these lists complete and
updated, lists are provided for major and minor spheres for those interesting in fully updating them. Now you can
recreate your favorite class in prime 2nd edition form.

The last major section is the Priest Spell Index that goes through every spell in alphabetical order with the name of the
spell, the level, and what page the spell is found on. This can still be a pain, however, as the books are not numbered
from page 1 to 286. For example, the last book starts on page 578 and ends on page 863.

Other material seems to have hidden itself in the book though. The *AD&D* Glossary, while not enough to stump an old time player, is a valuable tool for newer players. Even more impressive though, is the Errata, which includes four spells that were left out of previous volumes, as well as errata on other spells where information was simply wrong.

The black and white art serves to showcase the different spell effects and adds a further level of usefulness to the book. Unlike some companies, Wizards of the Coast does not try to drown the text with art. The nature of the book is a reference tool. The format follows that of the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* so owners of that series will find this one just as easy to use.

Even if you don't own the previous two *Priest's Spell Compendiums*, the wide range of information in the numerous appendices make this one a must have for all *AD&D* players and Dungeon Masters.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Pick

Ratkin, by Brian Campbell

Mokole, by Jim Comer

Published by [White Wolf](#)

136 pages for Mokole, 144 pages For Ratkin; $19.95 each

I really hate these books. Not that they're bad. Oh, no. If they were badly done, it would be easy. You could just look at them and go "Well, these suck."

Unfortunately, that's not the case. These books are actually very well done, and make the lycanthropic races they cover interesting. Which means the next time I decide I want to get a *Werewolf* game started, I'll once again have to deal with players asking, "Can I play an X (Bastet, Mokole, Ratkin, etc)?" and I'll have to say no. But I won't be able to say, "No, these character types are too briefly gone into in the *Player's Guide* to be run or GM'd properly."

Now I'll have to say, "No, you haven't bribed me sufficiently to be allowed to play an unusual character." I hate being honest.

Anyway, *Mokole* and *Ratkin* are the latest Breedbooks for *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. The Breedbooks have succeeded in being very good sourcebooks and very good reads, even if the characters they describe are supposed to be rare as hen's teeth.

Ratkin does a great job of expanding the world of the Ratkin. For those unfamiliar with the *Werewolf* paradigm, each were-race has a duty bestowed upon them by Gaia, the Earth Mother. The duty of the Ratkin (for the terribly slow at home, Ratkin are wererats) is revealed to be population control. Human population control, in case you were wondering. How do they do it? Famine and Pestilence (and quantity). The Ratkin are presented as the ultimate survivalists.

The Ratkin have some very cool stuff going on. There's a background called "Freak Factor" to indicate just how "far out" a character is. Wererats using strange technology, wererats from the deep umbra, and wererats from Kentucky all share space.

The writing in Ratkin does a great job of putting across the mood of the game. The wererats have a decidedly different point of view of the oncoming apocalypse than the Garou do. They tend to view it as a new beginning; civilization will be swept away, and the rats will take over. Ratkin scores very strongly on the "I want to play one" scale, which is good. Unless you're my GM, in which case it's bad.

Mokole does just as good a job with its title beastie. (Unlike Ratkin, you may not get what Mokole are; they're were-alligator/crocodiles/big-reptile-fellers. They turn into Dinosaurs.)

The Mokole, who've existed since there were swamps, are the memory of Gaia. They remember everything, going back to when dinosaurs ruled the Earth. The Mokole exist in four major "streams," which are sort of like tribes. They are found in Africa (The Mokole M'bembe), Australia (The Gumagan), the Far East (Zhong Lung), and India (the Makara).

I do like how each is differentiated from each other in mechanics (some have different memories than others, some

have different flaws and merits, etc.) and in flavor. You get a sense that each stream is separate, while still being part of the greater whole.

The Mokole also come across very interestingly. Their view of the impending Apocalypse is resignation; they've lived through mass extinction before, and figure they'll just do it again.

The coolest part of Mokole (at least in my lizard brain) is their dinosaur form. Each lycanthrope (or bete, as they're called) in the World of Darkness has at least three forms. A human, an animal, and a mid form (occasionally there are others). For the Mokole, instead of turning into a half crocodile beast, they turn into Dinosaurs.

The type is determined at character generation, and characters can choose neat abilities (spiked tails, armor, huge size, etc) depending on what kind of great lizard they are. There aren't any package deals (ie, for 5 gnosis you're a tyrannosaur or ankylosaur, for 3 you're a triceratops, which my *Champions*-player brain would love), but you can approximate pretty much any beast you can imagine.

One very interesting bit of Mokole that almost gets lost in the background is the option to play in the time of The Kings. It's only a page, but I can easily see it being made into a full historical game or just an expansion similar to *Werewolf: the Dark Ages*.

Each book does a great job of putting forth their respective breeds as playable PCs. Ratkin gets over the whole question of near extinction by reminding us, not that gently, just how quick rats breed. Mokole, on the other hand, pulls no punches in that regard. Generations, it reminds us, can pass before a full Mokole will be born in some villages.

The options for playing the characters are splendid. The toys are fun and make sense; one of my favourite gifts is Waxwork Monster, a gift that allows Mokole to disguise themselves as statues and dummies. Some clutches disguise themselves as roadside attractions using this gift. That's great.

So, yeah. *Mokole* and *Ratkin* are two great books for *Werewolf* players and GMs. They'll give you brand new avenues to playing and running what were previously sketchy characters.

I hate them so much.

-- Justin Mohareb

(Not Quite) 2001

We open with a black monolith.

The majestic chords of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* swell in the background.

A bone weapon is thrown into the air.

Apes work themselves into a frenzy teeming with excitement and anticipation as a new era of enlightenment dawns and. . .

. . .Er, not really. Pyramid just has a new editor: Steven Marsh. That's me, the lucky ape polishing the calcium club and hoping he doesn't break anything while he's looking for the pause button on the *Zarathustra*-blaring CD player.

Who am I? Darned if I know.

I'm a writer. I've been published in a fair number of places. I have the dubious honor of having been paid for essays, short stories, scripts, and poetry, proving my talents are so scattered no one knows how to label me.

I'm a gamer. I've been gaming for fourteen years, beginning with a Magic User named Zappo Zam who coincidentally rolled all 18's for his attributes. (I eventually grew up.) My first "mature" game was a **GURPS Supers** campaign that lasted three years. I've learned that I'll GM just about anything, including ***In Nomine***, fantasy, ***Star Trek***, ***Star Wars***, hard sci-fi, ***Prisoner***, ***Ghostbusters***, ***Torg***, cross-dimensional, pulp, ***Fading Suns***, ***White Wolf***, and ***Toon*** (to name a few). I've also been a player in almost as many games. I probably own about a hundred RPG systems, and four of my bookshelves moan from the burden of supplements and adventures.

I'm a magazine worker. I've edited, proofread, and rewritten. I've helped lay out articles. I've explained to subscribers why their issue #3 was returned to us with marks not unlike those made by a Doberman pinscher's teeth.

I'm a techie. I've designed websites with HTML for a year and a half, using only a text editor. I remember how to program in FORTRAN. I know what TWAIN stands for. I'm not sure who my congressman is.

I'm a lot of other things, too, and you'll learn more about me over time. (Be sure to ask about my unlikely bid as high school prom king some day.)

And now I'm the editor of *Pyramid*. As I run around these hallowed halls, my feet clomping while they struggle to fill these gargantuan shoes, I find myself asking, "What am I going to do?"

Answer: I want to make *Pyramid* your "Oh, wow!" magazine.

Now, magazines like *Newsweek*, *TV Guide*, *People*... these aren't your "Oh, wow!" magazines. These aren't the ones that make you rip them open to see their contents. You seldom say, "Oh, wow! An interview with infamous General Notnise Watabadchap!"

But *Pyramid*. . . *Pyramid* can be your "Oh, wow!" magazine, if it isn't already.

"Oh, wow! An article about making a realistic antagonist cult!"
"Oh, wow! Advice for how to surprise players by twisting horror monster cliches!"
"Oh, wow! Suggestions for turning current news into adventure ideas!"
"Oh, wow! Twenty inventions that changed the world!"
"Oh, wow! An adventure for the new RPG ***Bleemquest***!"

You get the idea.

Now, is every article going to be an "Oh, wow!" article for everyone? Of course not. What one GM needs to add some spice to his American Revolution *Wild Cards* game is quite different from what a *Traveller* player needs to play a more realistic mercenary.

My goal is not to please you with every article. Cherry Jell-O mildly pleases everyone, but no one goes, "Oh, wow! Cherry Jell-O!" But if, every issue, I can put at least one article, feature, column, or review that makes you go, "Oh, wow!" then I'll consider that issue a success. Of course, you'll hopefully be pleased with many of the other articles, but I want your Friday (or whenever you check out the new *Pyramid*) to always be your "Oh, wow!" day.

Among other goals, I want to make some theme issues. Every so often (probably not more than one week every two months or so), I want an issue to be more tightly focussed than normal. So we might have an April Fool's issue, or an Espionage issue, or an issue devoted to Epic Storytelling. It won't be too often, but hopefully enough to add some flavor to the mix.

I want *Pyramid* to be fun. To me, roleplaying games are supposed to be fun. Roleplaying isn't about rules lawyering, or exploring complex emotional issues, or killing every monster that seeks to thwart you. It's about a bunch of players trusting a GM with their Saturday night, and the GM hoping he doesn't betray that trust. If everyone is having fun arguing about rules, or wallowing in angst, or hacking critters 'til they stop moving, great! More power to them. But the fun is the important part. So rather than print an article about, say, undersea drowning rules, I'd rather print an article that talks about running an adventure underwater, with rules as a sidebar or appendix, because I personally think the latter article is more useful in getting the juices flowing for a successful gaming night. (And if you disagree, for pity's sake let me know! For that matter, let me know if you agree with me, too.)

Finally, I want to make sure the magazine is on the pulse of the gaming world. The Slushpile is public enemy number one for this editor. I don't want your submissions to be timely in July when you wrote them, only to have them succumb to the ravages of age. I've read every submission, and replied to about half of them. Once the Slushpile is tamed (with any luck, by next week), I hope to reply to your new writings within a month. I want to learn what you like to read, and hopefully give it to you; a magazine isn't a one-way stream of information, but a two-way dialogue between its creators and readers. And we're listening.

So next week I'll talk about some mistakes I've made as a GM (presuming nothing more interesting happens in the interim).

And hopefully I'll make you go "Oh, wow!" as the monolith's shadow washes over you.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

(One star) ". . . a one-eyed, berserk, deaf hunchback who is afraid of the dark. . ."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Return to Metro Section Baghdad

"I sit in a chair and read the newspapers.
Millions of men go to war, acres of them are buried, guns and ships broken, cities burned, villages sent up in smoke,
and children where cows are killed off amid hoarse barbecues vanish like finger-rings of smoke in a north wind.
I sit in a chair and read the newspapers."
-- Carl Sandburg, "Smoke"

About a year ago, I expounded upon my thesis that anything occurring in a city can become fodder for any number of different roleplaying directions, to buttress the notion that urban roleplaying is more than just narrow, twisty alleys and dickering with Easterners in the souk (or boardroom). The tactic I chose was to select an issue of the *Los Angeles Times* at random (or, rather, the issue for the day I thought of the column idea) and pick out local news stories, throw a little genre English on them, and recast them in explicitly non-mundane (fantasy, Illuminated, etc.) urban gaming milieux. Hence, then, these stories, torn from the *Times* headlines for February 14, 2000, and flung in the direction of Baghdad.

Loan Fraud Suspect Keeps Authorities Frustrated

Thanks to overlapping jurisdictions, large legal loopholes, and enough gall to choke a bison, con artist Frederick Tucker has been able to defraud poor would-be home buyers for 23 years. Tucker posts flyers featuring cloned federal fonts and logos soliciting applications for government-sponsored ultra-low interest housing loans. After the marks sign the (lengthy and confusing) application, they discover that the interest is (surprise) actually much higher, and they must pay up to 2% of the loan's value to void the loan and preserve their credit rating. The state government is attempting to obtain a restraining order that would at least provide grounds for prosecution should Tucker yet again defy any of a number of findings of fraud against him, but chances look grim. While this would make either an interesting scam for a PC group of antiheroes, or suitable evidence of scumminess for a low-level urban vigilante game, a tale of ego, gall, and confusing rules says one thing to me: magic.

Recast Tucker as a fraudulent magic user; he's a real magician, to be sure, but he's not actually formally affiliated with the Mage's Guild (or the Lord Mayor, or the King, or the temples of Mithras, or whoever is the official Big, Remote, Good-Guy source of magical protection in the city). He claims such a connection, though, thus convincing marks to purchase subsidized demon-warding spells. Midway through the ritual, he milks them for all they've got, threatening to leave the ward half-completed (and thus, leave their house especially open to demonic power) if they don't pay him a lump sum in cash to remove it. So, why can't the Mage's Guild put the smackdown on him? First off, cracking down on a fellow mage involves a wizard's trial; a trial in which other mages' dirty laundry might get aired. Tucker might also be a member (or claim to be a member) of a different, secretive guild, one the Mage's Guild doesn't want to start an open feud with. He might be under the protection of the King (perhaps he's married to a poor, but noble, member of the royal family), or of the Fae (willingly or unwillingly). Or, Tucker has a lot of ignorant folks' signatures (in blood) on contracts tying them to him; if he's taken down, the magical backlash might harm these poor rubes. Or, worse yet, the demon wards he's actually raised might drop if he's killed or stripped of his magical powers. The PCs can be magi trying to build a magico-legal case against Tucker (in, say, an *Ars Magica* game), or mundanes the Mages' Guild has hired to take the backlash and solve the problem the old fashioned way in a standard fantasy game. They might even be members of a federal anti-occult crime task force in, say, a modern-day *GURPS Voodoo* game, in which Tucker becomes a very unscrupulous houngan promising exorcisms and ritual cleansing - and figuring out which loa protects him will involve politics and lawsuits in the spirit world.

Controversy Grows Over Bikes In Park

This story concerns the proposal to allow mountain-biking in Elysian Park. (For you urban fantasy gamers scoring at home, don't you think it's kind of cool that the home of the classical hallowed dead is also the home of the Los Angeles Police Academy?) Mountain-bikers are for it; some nearby residents, park users, and environmentalists are against it. Admittedly, it won't be easy to build a land-use conflict between mountain bikers and picnickers into an epic RPG

saga unless you're running an urban fantasy game heavily influenced by both Mercedes Lackey novels and Mountain Dew ads (or a truly warped *Unknown Armies* game). However, at its core, it's about the social friction around the introduction of any new element to an old setting, especially in a place already simmering with controversy. (The machinations of both the LAPD and the city fathers who built Dodger Stadium there have bred much justified skepticism in the locals.) These same dynamics, introduced into the background of an ongoing conflict (such as the downtown developers versus the Hispanic residents of the area in real life, or the "normals" versus the mages, elves, mutants, or whatever in a game setting), can create depth and dimension. Maybe the city council is opening up a park to flying carpets in 1950s *GURPS Technomancer* and the PCs have to keep the neighbors calm to defeat a Fear Demon or just because it's the right thing to do. Or the neighborhood committee has banned supers (or mutants) from "their" park after a rash of caped criminality elsewhere. Human reactions are human reactions, whether they're to mountain bikes or illusionary griffin combat. Some folks will be scared, some will be snotty, and some will just be trying to sell the rights to Mountain Dew.

Beatings Alleged To Be Routine At Rampart

This is a followup story about investigations into sytematic police brutality in the anti-gang unit at the LAPD Rampart Station. Over 30 convictions have been overturned, and over 20 cops have been fired, suspended, or quit since the investigation began. This is a prototypical example of the small "c" conspiracy; the small ring of cops each protecting the others by silence, by alibis, and by muscle. Such a group can rapidly become quite powerful (and feared) in its precinct, even if thuggery never becomes corruption. A low-power PC group of any sort can find itself more than matched against this kind of opponent. But let's pull out a notch; any small "c" conspiracy can grow into something larger. Our ring of cops can be the first cell or the nucleus of a new fascist death-squad network, as in the Dirty Harry movie *Magnum Force.* (Or of a nihilist death-squad network, as in *Fight Club.*) By combining the cults of order and physicality, the cops might stumble into the worship of an ant-god, or into Lodge service in *GURPS Voodoo.* Or, of course, this small "c" conspiracy could turn out to be only the tip of an iceberg; many capital "C" Conspiracies would be delighted to lurk under such a fine group of public servants. Anyone from the Thule Society (cleansing society of its "unclean elements") to a criminal (or mystical) tong eliminating competition to the Freemason-Illuminati nexus that controls Scotland Yard, or the British Crown, or the Reptoids could find any number of useful tasks for a ring of rogue cops. From a chokehold on a murder suspect to a chokehold on the global economy, the thread is there for your PCs to pick up on.

Trial Starts On Claim That Officers Let Robber Die

Remember the North Hollywood bank robbery shootout? Two bandits wearing body armor and firing AK-47s shot it out with pistol-packing cops for 40 minutes, exchanging almost 2,000 rounds. At the end, one robber killed himself; the other died of blood loss after spending an hour handcuffed in the street. In short, it sounds a lot like a typical RPG scenario climax, with the big gun battle, the bad guys dead, Truth and Justice vindicated, and $300,000 in a nylon bag. But in the real world, stories never end. The second bandit's family is suing the city, several police officers, and the Fire Department for negligence and deliberate indifference. Obviously, much fun (or much angst) can be had in a supers game if the Bloodwraith's family sues Captain Crimson and the Anti-Power Squadron for excessive force and civil rights violations. It can be even more fun if the legal system diverges from what we're used to here in the modern West; the PCs can be simultaneously lauded for their actions by the duke and liable for substantial weregild as the cost of doing business. Perhaps the dead villains had influential friends (or family) at court who now make the PCs' lives miserable. Or, perhaps, the dead men were Illuminati (or Discordian) agents, and the conspiracy now pursues the PCs through the legal system as a way of keeping them in the spotlight (and keeping the heat on). Add to the vendetta the possibility of a haunting, or even a judgement from beyond. Are the PCs tried in the Necropolis Courthouse for killing the villains without honor? Perhaps the lawsuit itself is magical, serving as a rite of exorcism (in which case the plaintiff and defendant might find themselves on the same side mystically though opponents legally). Or perhaps it's a conjuring, as the official representatives of Truth and the Land reconstruct the moment of the dead man's passing with ever-more exacting energies. Is there law after death? If not, why not? The dead have rights, you know - and in Chicago, they can outvote you.

By James Maliszewski

Art by Art Today and Colored by Phil Reed

A common complaint about White Wolf's *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* (and indeed all the historical *World of Darkness* games) is that it presumes far too much knowledge on the part of the Storyteller and players. Although the game and its supplements have done a good job of providing a broad overview of the Renaissance period, they have not fleshed out any region in detail sufficient to serve as the basis for a lengthy chronicle. Even the excellent *Castles and Covenants* describes no locales larger than a city.

Consequently, many *Sorcerers Crusade* Storytellers may find themselves at a loss. This article is intended to flesh out one corner of Europe to serve as the home base for a Renaissance era *Mage* chronicle: the Iberian Peninsula. In addition to the basic physical and historical facts about the region (between 1450 and 1500), this article includes story seeds and character sketches as well. While providing information of use to a *Mage* game, much of it will prove helpful to anyone running a game in Renaissance Iberia. This article is necessarily short and broad in its outlines. Those interested in adding further depth to their *Sorcerers Crusade* chronicles should consult the brief bibliography at the end of this article.

Geography and Resources

The landscape of the Iberian Peninsula is uneven in character with unequally distributed irrigation. Some regions enjoy wonderful fertility, while others are nothing but steppes. In other parts, the abrupt slope of the ground is such that the rains produce torrential floods in the rivers and thus negate their beneficial action.

At the same time, the land's unevenness results in great differences of climate. The arid prairies of certain parts of Castile are in striking contrast with the fertile -- though monotonous -- plains of the Campos district and Lower Aragon. Likewise, the extremely rich arable lands and meadows of the southern and eastern regions contrast with the perpetual snows of the Pyrenees, the Cantabrian Range, and the Sierra Nevada. No less uneven is the distribution of rainfall - from the northern provinces, with their ever-clouded skies, to the almost invariably dry and transparent atmosphere of the south. The contrast extends even to the seas surrounding the peninsula - the tranquil Mediterranean, the stormy Bay of Biscay, and the Atlantic with a character midway between.

Silver, lead, and iron are abundant in the peninsula. Veins of quicksilver are found in Almaden, besides others of less importance elsewhere. There are also copper, gold, nickel, tin, and zinc. Sulfur and common salt are abundant, as well as waters impregnated with sulfates and with sulfur. The peninsula's botanical resources are abundant and various - the chestnut, the oak, the cork tree, the pine, and a number of other conifers. The peninsula produces a great quantity of cereals, rice, oranges, lemons, melons, and other fruits in immense variety, in addition to oil, figs, carobs, pomegranates, alfalfa, peppers, dates, and saffron. Excellent wines are produced in nearly every region, the most highly esteemed being those of Jerez, Malaga, Montilla, Cariñena, Valdepenas, and Rioja.

History

Old legends say that the children of Tubal and Tarsis, son and grandson of Japheth (himself the son of Noah) populated the peninsula. These were the Iberians, who formed the aboriginal population. In time, the Celts came in upon them by way of the Bay of Biscay. The collision of the two races formed the aboriginal population of the

peninsula.

Upon these first strata of population were superimposed the colonists and conquerors. The colonists were Greeks and Phoenicians, while the conquerors were (in order) Carthaginians, Romans, Goths, and Arabs. Under Roman domination, the peninsula received Christianity. An ancient tradition claims that the Apostles Paul and James came to the region, as well as "the Seven Apostolic Men" (Torquatus, Ctesiphon, Secundus, Indalecius, Caecilius, Hesychius, and Euphrasius) to whom the foundation of various churches is attributed. Connected with the coming of St. James is the very ancient tradition of Our Lady of the Pillar of Saragossa.

The Visigoths, after sacking Rome in 410, turned towards the Iberian Peninsula, and occupied its northeastern portion, which then received the name of Gotha-landia (later Catalonia). The Visigoths soon extended their rule over most of the peninsula. Eventually, the Gothic kingdom weakened because of decadence and the discord produced by its elective system of monarchy.

Meanwhile, Muslim armies were advancing across North Africa. Legend has it that Count Julian, governor of Ceuta, in revenge for the rape of his daughter, Florinda, by King Roderic, invited the Muslims and opened the gates of the peninsula to them in 711. As the Muslims armies began their conquest of Iberia, some of its inhabitants settled down to live under their rule, calling themselves Mozarabs. The rest fled to the mountains to the North, where they formed the four chief rallying-points for the Reconquest: Astorias, Navarre, Aragon, and Catalonia.

The Muslims (also called the Moors) succeeded in conquering most of southern Iberia within seven years of their invasion. Thus began the 800 year long struggle between the Christians and the Muslims for control of the peninsula. This struggle was most active between the ninth and thirteenth centuries. Over time, it acquired the religious zeal of a crusade and became known as "the Reconquest" (or Reconquista in Spanish).

In addition to its crusading character, the Reconquest was also a series of military expeditions to plunder the wealth of the Muslim domains and a popular migration to the south. The clergy participated fully in the Reconquest. They stirred popular support for the endeavor, lobbied the Iberian monarchies to take part, and assembled their own private armies to conquer lands for the Church.

The monarchies, in turn, made contracts with the leaders of military expeditions. These contracts gave the Crown certain rights over newly conquered territories in exchange for rewards for the leader of the expedition. Generally, the reward was the grant of a hereditary title. This title conferred upon the leader military powers and the right of governing the conquered land. In addition, the Crown commonly granted the right to any spoils from the conquest, including captives.

In this way, the Reconquest operated under the sanction of the Church and the Crown. This guaranteed the moral and legal authority of any expedition against the Muslims. All contracts for lands or titles were placed in a written document, called a capitulacion. Whenever a change in the monarchy occurred, noble families could prove their possession of lands and titles by presenting a copy of their capitulaciones. This system will become a cornerstone in the relationship between the Crown and the conquistadors of the 16th century.

In addition, the struggle of eight centuries to recover territory wrested from them by the Moors, who were enemies at once of their land and of their faith, created in the Iberian peoples a fusion of patriotic and religious feeling that distinguishes them from other European nations.

Politics and Government

In the fifteenth century, five independent kingdoms occupy the
Iberian Peninsula. These are Aragon, Castile, Navarre, Portugal, and
the Muslim stronghold of Granada. In 1469, the monarchies of
Aragon and Castile unite upon the marriage of Ferdinand, heir to the
throne of Aragon, to Isabella, heir to the throne of Castile. Isabella
becomes queen of Castile in 1474 and brings about "the Union of the

Crowns" in 1479, creating the state we know as Spain. This new state succeeds in expelling the Muslims from Granada in 1492. With the establishment of political stability, Ferdinand and Isabella turn their attention to a policy of overseas expansion.

Navarre is a small kingdom in the north heavily influenced by France. It remains independent of Aragon and Castile until 1512. Portugal came into existence as an independent kingdom in 1179 with the assistance of the Knights Templar and other fighting orders. Along with Aragon, it quickly became an important seafaring state. Granada in the south is the last Moorish kingdom in Iberia. Since the 13th century, it has been obliged to pay tribute to Castile. In 1492, the ruler of Granada will refuse to pay this tribute, leading to the conquest of his domain by Spain.

The "grandee" families comprise the highest level of Iberian society. These great nobles control the majority of the peninsula's land in the form of vast estates. The lesser nobility is distinguished from commoners by bearing a coat of arms and the coveted title of "Don." Many of these lesser nobles won their arms and title through the aforementioned capitulacion system. Like the Church, all nobles are exempt from royal taxation.

Also significant is the aristocratic concept of the gentleman or "hidalgo." ("fidalgo" in Portugal) A hidalgo lived for the Reconquest. He achieves the seemingly impossible through courage and force of will. Yet, he conducts himself according to a strict of honor. A hidalgo respects only those who had gained their position through force of arms rather than through manual labor. This concept of the hidalgo has thus become the Iberian ideal of masculinity.

The Economy

Because of it geography, the Iberian kingdoms lack arable land outside of the plateaus and coastal areas. Thus, they cannot produce sufficient cereal crops for their own use. These kingdoms are dependent on imported grain and manufactured good from the Genoese and northern Europeans. In exchange, Iberia offers specialty goods like wool, wine, fruit, cork, olive oil, salt, and fish.

Castile possesses a primarily pastoral economy and produces high quality wool. The Republic of Genoa monopolizes Castilian wool exports and has a significant presence in the region. Many Iberian cities are thriving commercial centers that compete with the powerful Italian merchants of Genoa and Venice, particularly for the spice trade with the east. Italian traders and sailors are thus a common sight in major port cities like Barcelona, Cartagena Lisbon, Porto, and Valencia. Lisbon, in particular, is a thriving center of trade and exploration. Early in the fifteenth century, Portugal began its explorations and has benefited from the ivory, slaves, and sugars provided by its voyages.

The Clergy

Like all European clergy, those in Iberia are divided into two groups: the secular hierarchy and the religious orders. The secular hierarchy includes the clergy who maintain the peninsula's parishes and cathedrals. These clerics generally come from the commoners and merchant classes. They are somewhat loosely organized and often must rely upon their own economic activity to support themselves. Unless their bishop takes an interest in them, secular clergy operate

under very loose supervision.

The regular orders, on the other hand, are well educated and tend to come from noble families. For these reasons, religious clergy view their secular counterparts with some disdain. Religious clergy are strictly organized and financially well endowed. Important religious orders in Iberia are the Cistercians (especially in Portugal), Dominicans, and Franciscans. By the middle of the next century, the Jesuits will play a prominent role as well.

Relations with the Jews

During the Reconquest, the Jews became more numerous and acquired some power within Iberia. Many of these Jews were former subjects of the Moors, who converted to Catholicism to avoid suffering repercussions at the hands of their Christian "liberators." Throughout the peninsula, the Christian kingdoms passed laws that restricted the practice of Judaism. In one case, the Jews of Toledo protested against laws that prohibited the building of new synagogues.

Even Jews who did convert were considered suspect. In one instance, the common people, fearing what they saw as undue Jewish influence in government, perpetrated a massacre of Jews at Toledo. In 1391, another massacre took place, beginning at Seville. A little later, the Jews of Toledo, Burgos, Valencia, and Cordova were attacked, and similar attacks took place in Aragon, especially at Barcelona. Oppressed by restrictive laws and feared by the people, they were finally expelled from Spain by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1492, who regarded them as dangerous to the religious unity and the security of the country because of their supposed relations with the Moors. Many Jews took part in expeditions to the New World as a way of avoiding the strife of Iberia.

The Spanish Inquisition

Connected with the persecutions of the Jews is the institution of the Inquisition. Jaime I, King of Aragon, introduced it into Spain in the thirteenth century to stop the spread of the Albigensian heresy. However, the Spanish Inquisition did not acquire its true character and importance until Ferdinand and Isabella established it in Castile in 1478. The Catholic Sovereigns feared the faith was endangered by false converts from Judaism (known as Marranos) and from Islam (known as Moriscos).

The Inquisition concerns itself primarily with the orthodoxy or heterodoxy of doctrines and, consequently, of offenses against faith or morals. Its judges are at least forty years of age, of unimpeachable reputation, and masters of theology or doctors of canon law. When they pronounce a sentence, the guilty party is handed over to the secular government to be punished according to the laws of the realm. The laws of Spain provide the punishment of death by fire for heretics who refuse to be converted and the same penalty for heresy and apostasy.

The laws regulating the processes of the Inquisition are Spanish, and not laws of the Church. The Spanish Inquisition, although established by virtue of a pontifical Bull, is to some extent independent of Rome, as appeals lay with the Archbishop of Seville, who passes sentence in the Pope's name. The Tribunal of the Holy Office, as it is called, is made up of thirteen provincial tribunals, with territorial jurisdiction, and a supreme council, which supervises them and judges appeals.

The appeals process is minutely regulated and far superior to the civil tribunals of the day. However, anonymous accusations may be considered and the names of accusers and witnesses are concealed from the accused. Torture is not arbitrarily employed, but only when sufficient proof already exists, and even then it is applied less barbarously than in most civil tribunals. The sentences pronounced are: abandonment to the secular arm for the impenitent heretic; reconciliation for the repentant; abjuration, when there is a suspicion of heresy; and absolution. Only the impenitent are condemned to the stake, and the number of condemnations has been greatly exaggerated.

The Knights Templar

On Friday, October 13, 1307, the King of France gave orders to arrest all Knights Templar residing within his domain

on charges of sodomy, blasphemy, and witchcraft. He then called upon the Pope to issue a Bull outlawing the order.

In Portugal, the Templars had helped expel the Moors from Algarve. The Portuguese king at the time, Diniz, could not overlook this valuable service to the Reconquest. Diniz thus modified the Pope's Bull. He allowed any Templars in Portugal who wished to escape to do so. He then seized and occupied the property of the Templars and used it to establish his own national order, the Military Order of Christ.

This "new" order continued to wear the red crusader's cross of the Templars and was entrusted with maintaining safe routes to the Holy Land. The Military Order of Christ numbered many former Templars as well as members of the nobility. They thus became influential at the Portuguese court. Not surprisingly, the Military Order of Christ also contains members of the Cabal of Pure Thought and their sympathizers, thereby making Portugal a potentially dangerous place for non-Daedalean mages.

Future Fates

The Spanish Pope Alexander VI issued a Bull in 1493 to prevent any disputes between Spaniards and Portuguese about their discoveries in the East and West Indies. Alexander established a line of demarcation between them -- the meridian running 100 leagues west of the Azores, decreeing that newly discovered lands west of that line should belong to the Spaniards, and those east of it to the Portuguese. Afterwards, the Treaty of Tordesillas substituted another line, 360 leagues west of the Cape Verde Islands - an arrangement that gave Brazil to Portugal.

The Catholic Sovereigns, by reuniting the Crowns of Castile and Aragon, annexing Navarre, and completing the Reconquest by defeating Granada, established the political unity of Spain. With the Inquisition and the expulsion of the Jews, they achieved its religious unity. The marriages of their children to the Kings of Portugal and of England (Catherine of Aragon) and to the son of the Emperor Maximilian, secured to Spain the friendship of the leading states. The discovery of the Americas and the conquests in Africa paved the way for Spain's imperial ascendancy.

Unfortunately, the death of their son Prince Juan caused the crown to pass to Charles I (better known as Holy Roman emperor Charles V), son of their daughter Juana la Loca. Charles V, attracted to Italy by the ancient strife with France for the possession of the Italian states, and to Germany by his inheritance of the imperial throne from his grandfather Maximilian, was more the Emperor of Germany than the King of Spain, and diverted Spanish foreign policy from America and Africa.

Religion, Morality, and Customs

Iberians are, on the whole, a religious people. They are well inclined to the practices of Catholic worship. In their popular festivals, secular diversions hold an equal place with religious observances. The morning is devoted to magnificent church functions, and the afternoon to balls, bullfights, and other amusements, which are carried on into the night. A great variety may be noted in the character of the popular diversions in the different sections, while the religious features are uniform and universal. In Andalusia and Murcia, the bullfight still holds first place. In Valencia, the enthusiasm for it is not so great, and still less in Catalonia, Aragon, and other regions. Catalonia is much addicted to dancing, and its popular dances are many.

There is also great difference in the popular songs of various regions. In the sections where Arabic influences have prevailed, singing is very general, but without a chorus, sometimes accompanied by the castanets, sometimes by the guitar. Another instrument very much used is the gaita (bagpipe), a goatskin bag filled with air by means of pipe that produces a continuous, monotonous sound. The inhabitants of the Basque provinces are noted for their good ear and the tunefulness of their songs, and of all the Iberian peoples they practice choral singing most.

There are processions that have become widely celebrated, to which the people of the surrounding district flock, such as the festivities of Holy Week at Seville and of Our Lady of the Pillar in Saragossa. The most popular devotion of the Iberians is to the Blessed Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, particularly under her titles of the Immaculate Conception, of the Seven Dolors, of Mount Carmel, and of the Rosary. Many women bear the name of Mary to which is added

some distinguishing title, de la Concepción, del Rosario, del Carmen, de los Dolores. Commonly, however, they are addressed only by the particular invocation, hence the Carmens, Dolores, Rosarios, Conchas (Concepcion), Mercedes, etc. There is scarcely a town that does not possess a chapel or sanctuary dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, to which pilgrimages are made once or more frequently during the year. Many of these images are considered miraculous and are the centers of poetic legends.

Crays and Covenants

As one might well imagine, the Iberian Peninsula is a Daedalean stronghold. These mages can be found in both Spain and Portugal (although rarely in Navarre) and exert great influence there. By far, the conventions with the most power and influence are the Cabal of Pure Thought (Gabrielites), the Celestial Masters, and the Void Seekers.

The Gabrielites spearheaded the Reconquest and seek to spread their philosophy of "One God, One World, One Church" far and wide. The Cabal is also influential within the military orders of knighthood of Iberia. On the other hand, the Celestial Masters and the Void Seekers have focused their attention outwards -- to the unknown lands across the Atlantic. Their influence is considerable as well, having convinced the monarchies of both Spain and Portugal to set their sights beyond the confines of Europe. Of the remaining conventions, only the High Guild has much of a presence in Iberia. Even then, most of the Grand Financiers are foreigners -- Genoese and Venetians primarily. They seek to take advantage of the peninsula's rise to prominence and the gold that will inevitably flow from its search for a western route to the Indies.

Several Traditions are likewise active in the region. The Ahl-i-Batin, while not as numerous as in the past, maintain a presence in Granada. The Order of Hermes and the Solificati remain in the peninsula, but their power has been weakened by the rise of the Inquisition, seeking sorcerers and other enemies of the faith. Because of their small numbers, they have managed to retain a modicum of freedom.

The Celestial Chorus is by far the largest Tradition in Iberia at this time.Composed primarily of devout Christians opposed to the Gabrielite-inspired Inquisition, the Chorus seeks to ameliorate its worst excesses. Choristers can be found in several prominent positions, but none have the ear of the peninsula's rulers to the same extent as does the Cabal of Pure Thought. Disparate mages also operate within the region as well. The Lions of Zion are particularly significant, having arisen to protect Jewish communities faced with persecution. The Lions are not as numerous as either the Daedaleans or the Traditions, but they are much more willing to use their magick to aid those they protect.

Finally, no discussion of the mages of Iberia would be complete without mention of the Infernalists. While not as common as inquisitors might claim, there are indeed servants of dark powers within the peninsula. They operate in the shadows and try not to draw attention to their activities. Their farsighted plans will take years to accomplish, but will prove a threat to Daedalean and Traditionalist alike in time.

Using this Setting

The Iberian Peninsula offers many possibilities for Storytellers looking to add some excitement to their Sorcerers Crusade chronicle. In the fifty-year period between 1450 and 1500, the countries of this region evolve from backwaters to centers of power. In the early portion of the century, the peninsula is fragmented. By its end, the Reconquest has been completed and unity achieved. More importantly, both Spain and Portugal have expanded their vision beyond Europe to the broader vistas of Africa, Asia, and the Americas.

Storytellers thus have a wide variety of options available to them. Political chronicles, centering on the maneuverings to unite the peninsula and dynastic wrangling are quite possible. Likewise, the story of the clash of cultures -- Christian, Muslim, and Jewish -- is readily available as well. Add to the latter the presence of the Spanish Inquisition and you have a potent mix of story ingredients.

Even more importantly, Iberia is the launching point for some of Europe's greatest feats of exploration. Not only does this provide opportunities to expand a chronicle beyond the shores of Europe, but it also creates a wonderful excuse

for mages of different nationalities and Traditions to meet and cooperate. By the end of the fifteenth century, Iberia draws explorers and adventurers from all over Europe to its shores. Never forget that Columbus was Genoese, drawn to Spain for its opportunities. The same could be true of player characters.

Here are but a small sampling of suggestions to jumpstart a *Sorcerers Crusade* chronicle in Iberia:

- A Tradition mage whose family acquired formerly Muslim lands is asked to secretly return rights to that land to the Ahl-i-Batin as a token of goodwill. Of course, the mage's family has other ideas.

- The Jews of a nearby city find themselves oppressed once more and ask for assistance from "righteous men" in securing their safety.

- The Inquisition has been active in the area in searching for agents of the Devil -- and they find them! An Infernalist is uncovered and the characters must cooperate with the Gabrielites and their minions against a common threat.

- A Portuguese expedition to Africa has need of men skilled in the arts of sail. The characters can sign on and see some of the world outside of Europe.

- Just before the siege of Granada, the characters must enter the city to safeguard libraries and laboratories before their magical contents are found and destroyed (or taken) by their enemies.

- Rumors abound of a secret Daedalean covenant in the northern mountains of Portugal. The characters set out to see if these rumors are true and what wonders this covenant might hold.

While the possibilities are not quite endless, there are nevertheless many stories to be told in this fascinating corner of Europe. Storytellers should have little difficulty in using the information in this article to create many memorable stories of their own.

Important Personalities

Ferdinand V (1452-1516)

King of Castile (from 1474), of Aragon (from 1479), and of Naples (from 1503), born in Sos, Aragon. In 1469, he married Isabella and ruled jointly with her until her death. He introduced the Inquisition, and in 1492, expelled the Jews. Under him, Spain gained international supremacy following the discovery of America, and in 1503 he seized Naples from the French, with the help of the Holy League. After Isabella's death (1504) Ferdinand was regent of Castile for his insane daughter Juana La Loca, and in 1512 gained Navarre, thus becoming monarch of all Spain. There can be little doubt that the Gabrielites influenced Ferdinand's actions both in Europe and in the Americas.

Prince Henry the Navigator (1394-1460)

Portuguese prince, third son of Joao I, King of Portugal, and Philippa, daughter of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. Henry set up courts at Sagres and Algarve and erected an observatory and school of scientific navigation. He sponsored many exploratory expeditions along the West African coast, and prepared the way for the discovery of a sea route to India. Henry was very likely not a Daedalean, but several of his courtiers certainly were. The covenant at Portus Crucis was created to continue his work.

Isabella (1451-1504)

Queen of Castile, born in Madrigal de las Altas Torras, Spain, the daughter of Juan II, King of Castile and León. In 1469, she married Ferdinand V of Aragon, with whom she ruled jointly from 1479. During her reign, she sponsored the voyage of Christopher Columbus to the New World.

Tomás Torquemada (1420-1498)

Tomás Torquemada was in Vallidolid in 1420 and was the true organizer of the Spanish Inquisition. At the request of Ferdinand and Isabella, Pope Sixtus IV bestowed on Torquemada the office of Grand Inquisitor. He was Dominican prior at Segovia (1452--74), and persuaded Ferdinand and Isabella to ask the pope to sanction the institution of the Spanish Inquisition. As grand inquisitor from 1483, he displayed great cruelty, and was responsible for an estimated 2000 burnings.

Francisco Ximénes de Cisneros (1437-1517)

Clergyman and statesman, born in Torrelaguna, Spain. He was educated in Spain and Rome, where he obtained from the Pope a nomination to the archpriestship of Uzeda in 1473. The archbishop refused to admit him, and for six years imprisoned him. Released in 1479, he was named vicar-general of Cardinal Mendoza, but gave this up to enter a Franciscan convent at Toledo. Queen Isabella chose him for her confessor in 1492, and in made him Archbishop of Toledo 1495. He was created a cardinal in 1507. On the death of Ferdinand (1516) he was appointed regent during the minority of the later Charles V. A munificent patron of religion and learning, he founded the University of Alcalá de Henares. Cardinal Ximénes was also a defender of the unique liturgy of the Mozarabs against those who would have suppressed it.

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Pyramid Review

All Flesh Must Be Eaten

Published by [Eden Studios, Inc.](#)

Created by Christopher Shy and George Vasilakos

232 pages, $30.00

Brains! **Brains!!** *Brains!!!*

That's what the opposition is screaming in the new roleplaying game *All Flesh Must Be Eaten*. It's billed as "The Zombie Survival Horror Roleplaying Game" and it's as much fun as you can ever have with a roleplaying game. If you've ever watched **Night of the Living Dead**, **Dawn of the Dead**, or **Day of the Dead** then you know exactly what this game is about. (For those of you without any culture, it's simply about being overrun by zombies and shooting them square in the head.)

The Bad

Starting with the worst elements of the game first and working up the ladder from there, the game is expensive, has a few annoying typos (the foreword, by Shane Lacy Hensley, is spelled forward, for instance), and some frustrating layout issues. Now these probably won't bother most players (though the cost definitely will) and if they were the only problems I wouldn't even bother picking at them. Unfortunately, there's another, slightly larger problem with the game: the manner in which rules are presented. I spent about half an hour trying to figure out what a number listed after the damage of weapons meant before I found it hidden in a sidebar. Not really a major problem, but one that ended up annoying me to no end (especially when I figured out the number was meant for those players using the "Story-Driven" rules included with the game). Also, a few pieces of art were nowhere near the quality of the bulk of the illustrations found in the book. As you can see, not really all that many bad points to the game at all.

The Good

The Unisystem. Never having seen *WitchCraft* or *Armageddon*, this was my first look at the Unisystem and I find it quite well done. Not the greatest game system created, but useable, fairly simple, and (best of all) easily modified and expanded; it uses archetypes for characters (12 are included in the book) and a simple d10 mechanic system (though other dice are used for various weapon damage ratings). My limited knowledge of *GURPS* tells me elements of the system are easily adaptable to any *GURPS* campaign (and any *GURPS Horror*, *Undead*, or *Black Ops* GM would find this book an excellent addition to their arsenal).

Another good thing about the game is that there is a system included for constructing custom zombies allowing the Zombie Master to make his zombies as powerful as he wants them to be. And just so things don't go overboard, there's a system to measure the strength of a zombie versus the overall power of the PCs. This is a very cool thing.

The Fantastic

The concept alone (core concept = shooting zombies) leaves no questions why *All Flesh Must Be Eaten* comes across as a slightly tongue-in-cheek horror game played more for mindless laughs and senseless slaughter than it does a serious RPG. But the game has excellent range, as proven when you start reading the final chapter, "Worlds in Hell."

Presented in this chapter are eleven "Deadworlds," or settings intended to be used for single game sessions (the game is perfect for use as a break between extended campaigns or at conventions). These are short, four page, descriptions of various worlds and specific explanations about just how zombies came to be a problem for each one. Ranging from the standard *Living Dead* movie setup played for intense paranoia with a little scattered humor to the very cool and horribly serious "Mein Zombie" (a WWII setting where Hitler manufactures a zombie army and the players are a bunch of GIs out to stop the Nazi monsters). The Deadworlds are a great idea and I hope to see many more in future supplements. Any *GURPS* GM using *Alternate Earths* and *AE2* would do very well dropping their players into any one of the eleven included Deadworlds.

You say single-shot games aren't your style? A GM can expand any Deadworld to a campaign setting -- though some are better suited to extended campaigns than others. Two settings in particular, "Grave Impact" (millions of years ago an ancient civilization launched a chunk of their world carrying "zombie disease" into space; it just recently impacted with our world) and "They Came From Beyond" (an ancient race traveling worlds through teleportation powers plays "Puppet Masters" on our world and the players must fight a grim war of survival against these alien invaders) seem well suited to what could become some very grim campaign games. And while not necessarily mentioned or detailed in the book, a campaign centered around "Professional Zombie Hunters" hopping from world to world could be a blast.

The other great part about the game is the beautiful cover (courtesy of Christopher Shy) and most (see The Bad, above) of the various illustrations inside the book.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot something else great about the book. It's a hardcover.

In Conclusion

All Flesh Must Be Eaten, while expensive ($30 for a 7.5" x 9.5" book with only 232 pages is unfortunately a bit much), is a great game and one that should do well (and will probably do even better if a lower-priced softcover is released) considering the love most gamers have for zombie movies. If you already play a Unisystem game you owe it to yourself to grab a copy. For those of you not playing *WitchCraft* or *Armageddon*, go ahead and check it out the next time you're in the store. You'll probably find it as irresistible as I did.

-- Philip Reed

Pyramid Review

Waves of Time (for Everway)

Published by [Rubicon Games](#)

CD-ROM, $9.95

The latest *Everway* adventure *Waves of Time* by Greg Stolze is released on CD-ROM (in PDF and HTML format, although the disk I received only had the HTML version), which I have semi-ambivalent feelings about. I think that, properly handled, CD-ROM is not only an appropriate but an exciting medium to put gaming material on. Despite the fact that I don't own a laptop (and in that I'm a lot less disadvantaged than those without a computer at all: yes, *Pyramid* readers there are still gamers without their own PC, modem and webpage) I think that releases like Marcus Rowland's ***Forbidden Futures*** show what can be done with a single disk. (Go to their [website](#) to see what I mean.) You can pack and awful lot of material onto one CD and I would really, really like to see, say, a compendium of **all** the Tekumel material out there, old and new, or the *GURPS CD-ROM* that Steve Jackson Games keeps dancing around the idea of producing.

But I come to the conclusion that *Waves of Time* not only doesn't use the medium very well but is a disappointment in itself. Firstly, the artwork included is minimal: a map, a copy of the cover illustration and a few pictures of characters. That's it. Given that *Everway*'s strongest suit is its visual focus this just isn't trying. Even if it was only one special art card, the previous releases for the game system all had something to spark the imagination of the players. If you're going to release products in an unusual format you should at least provide a product that makes use of that format and justifies the fact that you can't just put it in your pocket and take it down to your gaming session. Well, you can but you have to pack a laptop too. . .

Waves of Time intended to be a quest set after someone else's quest. The author explains that he wrote it in reaction to the many times he's seen *Everway* heroes ride into town, solve the problems the adventure set them and then ride away with a cry of "Our work here is done. Hi-Ho Silver and away!", leaving behind who knows what chaos, misery and garbage littering the streets that they are just too damn Heroic to deal with.

The former government of the realm of Wavebreak, neighbouring the great city of Everway, has been overthrown by A Motley Bunch Of Heroes and renamed Waverise by the revolutionary government. The Waveriders, a race of aquatic shapeshifters, have been released from a centuries long imprisonment. And our Heroes are cast in the role of the "James-T-Kirk-Cleanup-Squad": that elite formation that I suspect must exist to clear up the messes left by everybody's favourite violator of the Prime Directive ("He said everything would be all right, did he? He said you just had to overthrow your oppressors did he? And now none of the infrastructure works and you're all starving? Hmm, sounds about average. Sign this release form please. . .")

They have to go to a realm where someone has "overthrown the evil tyrant" and on behalf of the rulers of Everway, sort out who was evil, who wasn't and what attitude should be taken to the new revolutionary government. Are the Waveriders the inhuman monsters the old government claimed they were and what attitude will they take to the human inhabitants of the Realm now they're free? Are the revolutionaries idealists or thugs? And what were the real motives of the mysterious mage who masterminded the revolution?

All of which could make for some excellent adventuring. Except that all this product provides is the briefing papers that the heroes receive and some brief outlines of the possible problems they might face going back into the Realm of Waverise. There is no detailed description of the people and personalities that the players might encounter nor even an outline series of events. This throws far too much burden on the referee. What we have here is the outline of an adventure, not an adventure. (It says on the cover: "An *Everway* Book." Well, that's a bit grandiose for only 56 pages

but it avoids calling it "An *Everway* Adventure" which would cause problems with the Trades Description Act.) To make this workable. . . Well, I'd have to sit down and write the damn adventure myself right from the start. Given the space available on the disk, I would want from the author at least two detailed possible adventures (the "good revolutionaries" and the "bad revolutionaries" possibilities) with "adventure seed" outlines for other variants. It can't cost that much more to fill the disk with material: unlike a book, each page published does not require extra material and extra expense. All it takes is time and effort by the writer. Which is why, I suppose, I'm so disappointed.

Happily, given the way this has been released, only rabid fans of the *Everway* line (like me, believe it or not) will ever hear of it or get the chance to read it. Hopefully, the next release by Rubicon Games, a guide to *Everway*'s Strangerside district will come back up to the high standards set by *Spherewalkers*.

-- Michael Cule

Pyramid Review

Mindwalking: A Guide to Psionics (for Alternity)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

96 pages, $18.95

The second major general rule expansion for the *Alternity* game system, *Mindwalking: A Guide to Psionics*, expands upon the already strong core rules for Psionics adding a variety of elements that Game Masters can easily adapt for their own campaign settings. Author JD Wilker's goal is to provide a set of tools for GMs to use for developing Psionics in their game worlds. These tools include the mechanics for running psionics, how to run them and what trouble spots to avoid.

The introduction establishes a basic definition of psi powers and effects as well as an overview of how psionics will affect characters, non-player characters and creatures, and campaigns as a whole. The role of psionics in the two existing *Alternity* settings, *Star*Drive* and *DarkMatter*, are also examined.

The next section focuses on the mechanics of *Alternity* psionics. New powers, skills, perks, and flaws are described. *Alternity* provides two methods for having psionic characters. The first is the Talent, other character professions who happen to have a psionic skill (or skills). Talents are provided both as a character development option for players as well as a way of controlling the level of psionics in the game for the game master.

The primary psionic character is the Mindwalker. The Mindwalker creation rules, already present in the core *Alternity* system, are revised, refined, and developed to allow the player and GMs flexibility in creating psionic characters. Rules for determining power levels as well as usage and recovery rates are balanced and intuitive. There are a wide variety of powers available including standards such as telepathy, telekinesis, pyrokinetcs, and teleportation. Most of the powers are balanced and easily handled by the GM. The few potential trouble areas, mainly those dealing with temporal effects, are given either limits that maintain control without being too restrictive to players or have unique mechanics which minimize disruption.

A good example of this is Precognition. The ability to see the future could easily be overused and abused by even the most well-intentioned players. However, Wilker's solution is quite elegant. The GM determines when the power might activate (possibly even making the roll for the player); if the player decides to act on it, the action check (*Alternity's* core mechanic) roll is made. Success leads to the awarding of resort points, points which can be used to influence die rolls or even lead to a reroll. A high level of success means that these points can be used by anyone in the group. Precognition can still has a number of potential pitfalls, but many of those can now be worked out ahead of time, instead of on the fly during the game. A mental combat system is also provided, which uses existing skills, categorizing them in such a way that can allow the development of actual mental "fighting styles."

The next section covers psionic campaigns. The first basic structure used is Psionic Consciousness, a parallel of the preexisting Progress Levels, which are similar to *GURPS* tech levels. The PC levels range from 0 - No psionic activity to 8 - Parallelism where the entire population has high levels of psionic ability and may be moving towards a new stage of development. At each level there is a description of the basic role of psionics in society and what psionics may encounter. Recommendations are given on skill costs and other mechanical variations at each PC level. One of the key aspects of a psionic campaign, the relationship between psionics and the law, is also discussed. The second basic structure is Campaign Tone, three of which are enumerated: Realistic, Heroic and Superheroic. Each of these is given recommended psionic consciousness level range, careers and occupations, organizations, campaign themes, and other idea seeds.

The next section details a wide variety of tools available to the game masters. These include devices and drugs to augment, detect and counter psionic powers; non-player characters; and creatures. Also included here are "manifestations" of psionic powers such as haunted houses, thought-forms, and psionic artifacts. This section (and the book) concludes with two of the strongest parts of the book, Customizing the Campaign Model and Troubleshooting Psionics. Methods for raising or lowering the overall power levels are suggested as well as a mechanism for pushing the limits is presented, all of which will allow for the development of psionics that will easily fit into campaign worlds. Several issues on troubleshooting are discussed including the reasons why psionic individuals don't dominate society, how to manage psionic characters, and some specifics with pitfalls and problems that might occur with skills presented in the book.

Mindwalking: A Guide to Psionics is an excellent rules addition to the *Alternity* system and an innovative treatment of psionics as a part of a role-playing game. The tools are detailed, well-thought out, and numerous. The main problem is that *Mindwalking* stops at the rules and tools. There is a definite lack of examples of how these rules and tools can be applied, something that becomes quite evident when contrasting it with a comparable work such as *GURPS Psionics*. *Mindwalking* answers the mechanical and technical aspects of utilizing psionics and game masters who have a clear vision of their campaign and psionics' role in it will find all that they need. However, those who are not sure what they actually want in a campaign will have to look for additional inspiration elsewhere. But once they know what they want *Mindwalking* will show them how to create it.

-- Michael Breen

On The Internet, No One Knows You're A Dog

On the http://www.2000.census.gov/ web site, there's a small survey which asks if you, the causal denizen of cyberspace, would prefer to submit your census information on the net rather than through the mail. This seems perfectly reasonable until you sit down and think about it. Basically, the Census Bureau is conducting a survey of people online to ask if they would like to take a survey online.

I buy this logic. It appeals to my inner masochist. For the record, I gave my answer as "Yes."

This is all a little bit strange, but what does this have to do with gaming? Well, nothing, not in a direct survey-to-gaming sense, unless your conception of gaming is to fill in little circles on Scantron sheets. (I don't know how people game -- some people are very creative.) It's confounding. This is the same spurious logic which drives other mystifying online ventures from buying groceries to renting videos online. The point seems to be missed: in the net, there's no name, no body, and no accountability, not even for a survey about taking a survey.

Instances of inconsistencies are found all over the net. They're nearly commonplace. People believe they are communicating over the net with a person motivated by a human brain. For all anyone knows, the entire Internet may be populated by household pets or elaborate AIs hiding behind AOL email addresses.

Online, I don't have a body. No one knows if I'm male, female, or a baboon with a computer wired directly to my brain. No one knows what I look like naked or if I smell. No one knows if I'm fat or thin, or if I happen to like my home decked out in red and blue plaid. No one knows me at all.

This is true for online gaming.

Online, the character is essential, and a character needs a body, even the most metaphysical one. Without characters, even the greatest of games aren't going to get off the ground -- someone ought to be there to be doing the playing, after all. Yet, in an online gaming world constrained to the dimensions of text and imagination, especially a gaming online world such as a MUD, existence is mutable. I can log in, create my character and choose any body I imagine. I can be a sexy vampire, a shiny dolphin, or a drooling, cthuloid spawn. It's an amazing advantage to gaming: flexibility, anonymity, and no messy, annoying details about physical presence (and Doritos crumbs and Coke cans -- except for on my desk) to get in the way of the suspended reality. It's almost the perfect set-up for a gaming experience.

And then there is the paradox -- with no body to get in the way of gaming perceptions, my gender can also be anything I can dream. I can switch with the flick of a bit, and voila, instant gender change.

Many players do this with disturbing regularity.

When I create a fresh character on an online world, I'm faced with that most awful of acts: having to set the dreaded @*sex* on my character. (That's for MUSH, at any rate -- Your Online World May Vary.) Many worlds offer the two standard choices provided to mankind by biology: male or female. These are the norm for more straightforward worlds that focus on hack-and-slashing and realistic roleplaying.

But other worlds, such as PyramidMOO, offer a whole galaxy of genders, including different and interesting versions of "neither" or "neuter." These include the *splat*, which uses the vague pronouns **e*, *h**, *h*s*, and *h*self*, the generic neuter, the royal "You", and the occasional tentacles in various unnamable places. I can associate myself or disassociate myself from my physical gender in any manner I see fit. Once tied to the gender of my physical body, I am now free to be whatever I wish: I can be a woman, a man, or a small furry green thing.

The gender swapping in the online community is so fast and furious that the female characters are often challenged to prove that they are played by genuine women. A vast number of online players are men, and some of those men switch gender to roleplay female characters. Many men take pains to make it as realistic and believable as possible.

On the other hand, those who lean toward "twinkiness" are easily spotted and give the entire thing a bad name. Male characters are rarely challenged, even if the person at the keyboard might not be male. Male characters are assumed to be, in general, men. But women? Despite the fact that there are certainly women -- more than one! -- who are very involved in the online community, female characters are still questioned as to their "real" identity.

Luckily, there are some "female" characters who are more obviously men than others. For example, on a World of Darkness MUSH, a friend spotted the following description on a character:

Joann is a very sexy and beautiful woman. She is dressed casually with clothes that are tight in just the right places. She stands 5'8" and weighs about 160 lbs. She has red hair and green eyes. 36C breasts compliments her nicely. She also has a jacket on.

Guys, here's a hint: *We know*. The breasts are the tip-off. No one else writes breast sizes. And best of all, most deeply twinky descriptions go on for pages and pages (and pages and pages...) of intimate, minute detail of cleavage. Not that I have anything against FacelessHotBabes. They're kind of entertaining in their own endearing, warm, fuzzy kind of way. Their descriptions are so fun that they're collectible -- hours of entertainment for the entire family! And it's not that these men choose to play women. It's that these men choose to play women with blatantly pornographic descriptions for one reason and one reason only -- these men play women they wish would date them.

Not that there is anything, you know, wrong with that. And women do this too. There's no favoritism in cyberspace.

But why would a man switch to a woman in an online world?

There are several reasons. The most obvious is a simple desire to roleplay. Online is the only place that a man can really play a female character with all her nuances and details. How many times in a face-to-face gaming situation has the "he" playing a "she" been called a "he" during a scene? There's no messy physical presence to destroy the illusion.

A part of it is also a desire to crawl into that oft wondered about and never truly understood female psyche for just a few moments. Although he could never really understand, he can experience what the general reaction is to him and how it's different from being treated as a guy. And it *is* different. The female character almost always gets more attention, some of it good, some of it bad.

The story goes like this: two characters, one male, one female, join a generic MUD. Both of them ask one of the local head honchos for equipment. One, the female, becomes magically laden with enough equipment to climb a few levels quickly and easily. She's pointed at the newbie area to get started, given some tips and advice, and encouraged to ask for help. The other one, the male, has the same plea, and he gets largely ignored. It's reverse sexism in the online world.

There's the negative attention as well. The "female" character can manifest extra attention in the form of relationships, love triangles, weddings, pregnancies, children, and various threats to file for divorce. And if the character is very lucky, there's a handy electronic, non-existant lawyer nearby to gain custody of the electronic, non-existant kids and the electronic, non-existant three bedroom ranch home.

And there's the final reason -- tinySex, the engaging in textual sexual encounters in a virtual reality. It's an unavoidable fact of the online world, to the point where there are entire communities dedicated to just this particular activity, some even dispensing with the trappings of human bodies.

Men swap into female bodies, that's a fact. Here's the big question:

Do women switch to men?

Yes.

How do I know?

Because I do it all the time.

Why do I choose to masquerade as a man? Maybe it's to escape exactly what the men are seeking when they change into women: the special attention that is expended upon the female characters who stand out in a predominately male crowd. I'm trying to escape being the center of attention, and attention that isn't always positive. More times then not, it's a simple desire to avoid the advances of male players, regardless of what skin they wear. It's a much more pleasant online gaming experience when I'm not constantly being asked or paged:

NamelessGamer says, "Hey baby, what's your sign? Do you like cheese?"

Being hit on, at any time, regardless how friendly, is distracting, unpleasant, and often demeaning. Why deal with it when the @sex bit takes care of it for me? I know that the community will not question yet another male character, and I know that the MUD will take care of the messy problem of pronouns for me, just like it would if I was a *splat* or a neuter.

But maybe there's something deeper which drives a me to flip my bit, as it were: an escape from the onerous reminder that a female is forced to be resigned to her gender, that the face of humanity, will always be man's and a woman will always be female first and a human being second. And with that flip of a bit, I can be a man, unquestioned, absolutely, without the stigma of the weaker sex. I find it is easier to work my way into the game and become a player instead of a center of attention, which is what I want in the first place. I want to be players in a community of players, not the centerpiece of attention, regardless of how well meaning and well motivated.

And maybe it's simply my desire to roleplay a character who happens to be male or female! Not everything needs to be deconstructed down to its base psychological elements. Online gaming is, after all, a gaming environment for everyone.

When I log into an online world, regardless of its form, I want to be taken as *me* first and a woman second. I want to be accepted into the community, to play the game at hand, to have fun, and to be part of the virtual world that all players have helped to create. My gender should not be an issue, but the fact, for both men and women, is that we bring our real world biases into the online world, and they are just as strong there as they are here. But the online world gives me, and all women, a tool to either sidestep this enviroment -- or embrace it completely. And most of the time, I simply want both.

Fact is, Online gaming has become so prevalent in the last few years that every type of character a player can imagine can exist in electronic form. All sorts of communities, filled with all different kinds of players with different kinds if playing styles and different preferences, can be easily coexist happily. There's a world out there for everyone.

Next Time. . .

There is an invisible line in the sand the online gamer crosses where the game is no longer a game, nor reality, but somewhere in between. And then there are those who wish to destroy that illusion utterly, completely, and without consequences. I'll talk about the immersion and THEM: the sociopaths, the player-killers, and those that make the online gaming world unsafe -- especially for woman gamers.

* * *

MUD: Multi-User Dungeon, or Multi-User Dimension.

Twinkie: A delicious Hostess snack cake, or an over the top PC.

by Tom Mazanec

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Phil Reed

Name: Aesop
Class: Weird parallel
Quantum: 3
Technology: early TL6
Current Date: 1994
Mana Level: Low or none

Aesop appears to have diverged from Homeline in the early 15th Century, when the first aesop domain appeared, probably somewhere in France.

An aesop domain is an area (actually a cylinder) where nonhuman mammals are transformed into aesop. If an animal enters an aesop domain for more than a few minutes, it undergoes a transformation over a period of several hours, involving an increase of IQ to human normal level, development of bipedal locomotion, increased manipulative ability (even horses can do a little manipulation with their fore-hoofs, deer get bad grip, foxes get poor grip and beavers, rats, squirrels, etc. get full hands which still look appropriately different), increased vocal ability (most get a disturbing voice, a some only have accents, and a few, such as anteaters, only get a few sounds), and size change to human normal. In addition, aesop get eidetic memory, and about 1% get photographic memory.

When an aesop dies, the location of its death becomes a one hex aesop domain. If an aesop dies in an aesop domain, the domain's radius increases to enlarge its area on the Earth's surface by one hex. If an aesop dies underground, the aesop domain is also buried until enough die there to make the radius greater than ten times the depth. If an aesop dies at sea, the domain is located at the sea's surface (not in the ship). So far no aesop has died in a hot-air balloon, an airplane or a submarine (the last has not even been invented yet in Aesop). Aesop domains seem to last forever, and a few have grown to a kilometer in diameter by now. Countless small ones are scattered on every sizeable land mass on Earth (including coastal Antarctica).

A new aesop has enough instinct to at least try to survive in the wild, but they also can be educated and trained quite quickly (due perhaps to their excellent memory) and can begin simple careers after several years. The psychology of an aesop generally has several quirks derived from its original species, and is also subject to rare, mild stress atavism. Disadvantages such as sleepy, colorblindness, etc. are also present, depending on species. Aesop suffer social stigma in virtually all parts of the world. They can reproduce sexually with their own species (although nearly all are "fixed", and most of the world population are derived from transformed animals). A language has recently been devised for aesop, such as aardvarks, who are limited to a few vocal sounds. "Feefah" is based on the same logic as the Morse Code ham radio operators use in Homeline (of course, a ham would have no advantage in learning it. . . he may even have to "unlearn" what he already knows). Usually, even feral aesop that are derived from predatory species are able to be approached cautiously before they are trained, but there are exceptions. . . most dramatically the recent Vampire War.

Currently, there are nearly 2 billion humans, with almost that many aesop. The Avalon Confederation covers nearly all of North Vespuccia, and Brasil nearly all of South Vespuccia (however, several Indian tribes have actually managed to obtain semiautonomous nation status, even if still dominated by the Confederation or Brasil). Brasil is the most advanced nation, after the 50 year long rule of Presidente Alberto Philho, a very intelligent and charismatic leader who has an intense personal fascination with science and technology and who has used his power to push their development in his country. The Confederation is becoming paranoid about this, especially as Avalon has long been inclined to be more hardline about aesops than has relatively liberal Brasil, and is growing even more so. A cold war has begun in the Western Hemisphere over aesop right to life (if nothing else) and the technological arms race which threatens to end a century of relative peace in human history.

The looming Hemispheric War would be Aesop's first great mechanized war. Africa is still pretty much the "dark" continent, with hundreds of "nations" of fluid borders, mostly based on tribal lands (a few are even aesop "tribes"). Asia is more fragmented than in Homeline, with Hindia smaller than our India and China divided into several nations (albeit with one culture). Meridia is allied with Britain, much as Homeline Australia. Europa has approximately similar borders as in Homeline Europe, except Germany is divided into Prussia (north) and Bavaria (south), while Denmark, Norway and Sweden are one nation (Scandinavia), and where the edges of Homeline's Russia are is a line of tiny ethnic principalities.

Aesop Timeline

Alternate Earth: Aesop

- **1441** - Earliest surviving documents referring to aesop. The aesop are mentioned as being featured in royal menageries and travelling shows. A monastic logbook from this year refers to "monsters" and "demons" in a fashion that seems to indicate aesop appearances as well.

- **1452** - Fall of Byzantine Empire to the Turks. An aesop killed in Constantinople earlier that year is widely regarded an omen of the disaster.

- **1493** - Columbus discovers New World across the Atlantic.

- **1519** - Martin Luther posts the 100 Theses at Wittenberg, starting the Protestant Reformation. Reformation churches quickly split into 3 groups, with one considering aesops demonic, a second regarding them as just clever beasts and a third holding them to have human souls.

- **1541** - The Papacy, finally forced to confront the aesop issue at the Council of Viterbo, splits in the Second Great Schism into three, mirroring the divisions of the Protestants.

- **1552-1569** - Schismatic War devastates Italy but fails to solve Schism.

- **1579** - First aesop domain in Hindia (India).

- **1587** - First aesop domain in China.

- **1599** - First aesop domain in Africa (in Egypt).

- **1615-1635** - Twenty Years War devastates Europa (Europe).

- **1622** - Puritists establish colony in North Vespuccia (North America). European colonization of North and South Vespuccia (South America) follows, often by refugees of all three divisions of Christianity fleeing the war.

A few aesop are transported to the New World, where they eventually die and create aesop domains there.

- **1654** - John Masterson, after using telescope to observe planets, proposes Heliocentric Theory.

- **1655** - John Masterson assassinated by religious fanatic.

- **1658-1708** - Half Century War. Europa, weakened by wars and the following famines and plagues, nearly falls to the Turks, but slowly drives them back after suffering great losses. More refugees flee to New World.

- **1750** - Augusto Moniz of Portugal starts religious frenzy with a vision of Lisbon's destruction by earthquake in 1755, followed by Return of Christ in 1756. The Great Earthquake rises this frenzy to a fever pitch, but the movement disintegrates in 1757.

- **1771-1779** - Avalon War results in independence of North Vespuccian colonies and formation of Avalon Confederation. The Founding Fathers are all different than in Homeline, although Joshua Franklin, the first President of the Confederation, shared a paternal great-grandfather with Homeline's Ben Franklin.

- **1788-1794** - Liberation War frees Brasil (Brazil) from Portugal. Within a few years, Mexica (Mexico) and the other Latin colonies have gained their independence, as well.

- **1798** - First aesop domain in Meridia (Australia).

- **1814-1825** - Human Emancipation movement in Avalon Confederation replaces human slaves with aesops.

- **1854** - Edward Langley invents steam engine.

- **1868-1874** - First Hegemonic War. Avalon Confederation defeats and incorporates Keneca (Canada), as well as taking over the northern quarter of Mexica.

- **1883-1892** - Second Hegemonic War. Brasil conquers nearly all of South Vespuccia, leaving only a thin fringe of small satellite nations along the north and west coasts.

- **1932-1948** - The Dozen Wars smolder around the planet, but together the twelve conflicts kill less than a million people. Human war is becoming more limited and unpopular as the aesop population grows and humans start to look at themselves as one people.

- **1948-1950** - The Great Influenza Plague kills nearly 100 million humans and aesop.

- **1989-1993** Vampire War in Mexica. Vampire bat aesops kill scores of thousands of humans, and are finally slaughtered in a huge massacre which creates the largest known aesop domain on Earth.

- **1994** - Jeremiah Gordon becomes 32nd President of Avalon Confederation and starts his six year term by promising a stand for humanity and against "the growing aesop threat".

Analysis

While so far only a small fraction of a percent of the world's area has become aesop domain, that fraction is growing at an accelerating rate. In addition, the growing aesop population is projected by Infinity to "swamp" the human population in a few decades, endangering human control of the world. In several centuries, computer simulations have the entire planet becoming an aesop domain, and no one is sure what happens after that. Even without computers Aesop has realized this and has tried to kill all the animals on the planet on several recent occasions in spite of the cost (both economic and ecologic); and while they wiped out some species, others seem beyond their means (Homeline, with its technology 2 full levels beyond Aesop, has not been able to eradicate mongooses from Hawaii, or rats from practically anywhere). And killing aesop just makes more aesop domains to worry about. Some in Infinity Unlimited

have suggested transporting the human population to an uninhabited world, but the logistics of doing this to a world 2 quantum levels away are daunting to say the least. Other worlds have problems rivaling Aesop's in scale, if not in bizarreness, and are not evacuated.

Another concern is whether aesops taken to another world will create aesop domains at death. One school of thought holds that aesop domains are a unique feature of the laws of physics of that world, so the answer is no. Another school of thought points to a recent observation concerning the epsilon force and is not so sure. It is often forgotten that there are six different known forms of parachronic energy, and Quanta reflect only the gamma. The 659 known worlds are spread fairly evenly with epsilons of 0-20, with a slight concentration around 10. But of the 26 worlds considered "weird", 23 are between epsilon = 8 and epsilon = 12. And 17 of these worlds, over half, are between 9 and 11. This is more than a "slight" concentration. It is possible that worlds with epsilons in this area are prone to such weirdness, and could be infected by aesop domains (for example). Since Homeline's epsilon is 10.23 and Aesop's is 10.24, this is a concern. Of course, Bizarro's epsilon is 3.71, and the United States of Lizardia's is 12.90, so this cannot be the whole story. Also, most of the 78 worlds with epsilons between 9 and 11 are more or less reasonably normal. . . so far, that is. If the aesop could spread aesop domains to other worlds, they could be used as a rather formidable, if slow-acting, weapon.

This assumes that aesop domains would function the same in other worlds. There is no guarantee that aesop domains in Homeline (for example) would not grow by square miles instead of hexes, or would not turn humans into anthropomorphic animals!

In Aesop, the position of the aesop is becoming more precarious. Some have formed friendships with humans, but this is becoming harder as inter-species strains grow. Organizations such as the Quilt of Life try to promote harmony between the species, while others such as the Image of God seek to keep aesops in slavery (usually corporate or governmental in 1994) even while they try to imagine how they can perform species cleansing without exacerbating the situation with each aesop death. The world seems about to enter some interesting times. One good break is that, at Quantum 3, Aesop is out of reach of Centrum. Infinity Unlimited has heard rumors that Centrum somehow blames Homeline's use of parachronics for the large number of weird parallels cropping up, but what Centrum could do with Aesop even if it were in reach is problematic (as it is for Homeline).

Adventure Seeds

North by Northwest

One of the players' characters has said or done something wrong. Now your team has been mistaken for secret agents of the Brasilian government, and the Avalon Defensive Intelligence Department is determined to terminate them with extreme prejudice.

The Next Final Solution?

In Prussia and Bavaria, a new, radically anti-aesop movement has sprouted. It advocates shipping aesop to the interior of Antarctica for extermination as soon as they are discovered, and a scorched-earth policy to reduce the mammal class to Homo Sapiens. And a lot of humans, especially Jews, are *not* considered Homo Sapiens. Most terrifying, their symbol is a swastika! Reich-5 is on Quantum 3 too, so they could get to Aesop without projectors. Does the Reich have the Secret? Even if this is just a coincidence and the movement home grown, how will your players respond to history seeming to repeat itself?

Patterns in Amber

"Whence we see spiders, flies, or ants entombed and preserved forever in amber, a more than royal tomb."
-- Sir Francis Bacon, *History of Life and Death*

It is immortality in death, the sun's tears and the moon's fire, lost treasure and secret power. It is amber, the bedrock of the oldest trade route known to man, stretching from classical Rome far back into the Neolithic era. In its luminous depths, we can find everything from dinosaurs to flying saucers. That is, as always, if we look hard enough.

Looked at through the pitiless lenses of reality, amber is fossilized tree (mostly pine, cedar, and sequoia) resin. Insects, leaves, flowers, fungi, worms, and other passengers trapped in the sticky blobs millions of years ago can still be seen frozen in their prehistoric death throes. This, of course, is what gave the mad scientist of Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* the notion of cloning dinosaurs from blood DNA in the belly of amber-encased Cretaceous biting flies. Even if the fossilization process didn't break DNA chains beyond any hope of repair (at least without alien hypertech or good old **GURPS Atomic Horror** knowhow), most amber only dates back to 20-50 million years ago, too recent for dino blood. However, Canadian and Lebanese amber both predate the dino doom; and it's not impossible that other isolated deposits exist. (A site in New Jersey discovered in 1996 revealed over 100 previously unknown Cretaceous and Jurassic species.) Rather than release velociraptors, however, perhaps your amber-popping mad scientists can release prehistoric plagues; researchers have claimed successful breeding of 25 million year old bacteria from amber, and an amber-borne virus would make an interesting change.

" And all around the maidens, the daughters of Helios, enclosed in tall poplars, wretchedly wail a piteous plaint; and from their eyes they shed on the ground bright drops of amber . . . But the Celts have attached this story to them, that these are the tears of Leto's son, Apollo, that are borne along by the eddies, the countless tears that he shed aforetime when he came to the sacred race of the Hyperboreans and left shining heaven at the chiding of his father."
-- Apollonios Rhodios, *Argonautika,* Book IV

And an interesting resonance, since the ancients identified amber as the tears of sacred maidens weeping for their slain brother, although the brother is variously named as Meleager and Phaethon, both solar heroes killed by fire. (Perhaps the virus causes a high fever?) Amber, of course, burns, and was used as incense in the worship of solar gods such as Apollo, whose tears also come into play here. (Although, since amber washes up with the tide, it was also associated with frozen moonlight.) Apollo's tears are associated with the Hyperboreans, who lived in the "land beyond the north wind." There, with Apollo as their king, they lived in a sunny paradise, which Avram Davidson has cleverly pointed out may derive from the fact that obviously tropical plants can be seen clearly embedded in "Hyperborean" amber.

That golden amber came south from the Baltic Sea through the Russian and East European river networks, into the Black Sea and thence to Greece. Which has led not a few scholars to wonder if perhaps the "Golden Fleece" that Jason searched for (which was also kept in a paradise associated with the Black Sea) might not have been a sacred chunk of amber. Amber that attracts wool when rubbed, because amber raises a powerful static charge. That charge gives electricity its name, since amber was "elektra" to the Greeks.

"I don't know if you know anything about UFOs, but all the characteristics of a typical sighting are shared with nocturnal insects swarming through an electrical air field: the sudden appearance of a colored, glowing light hovering in the night sky, moving in a nonmechanical matter, possibly humming, creating interference with radio and television signals, then suddenly disappearing."
-- Bambi Berenbaum, in *The X-Files,* "War of the Coprophages"

And when you combine insects (even preserved in amber) and electricity, you spark the gap to UFOs. Both believers and debunkers (most notably Philip Klass) have characterized UFOs as powerful clouds of atmospheric electrified plasma, generated by murkily obscure means involving weather inversions (debunkers) or secret Tesla technology (believers). This theory goes all the way back to the "foo fighter" sightings over WWII Europe, some of which seemed to be intelligent ball lightning. Rumor spread that Hitler's mad scientists (who, had they only known, could have been raising an army of dinosaur warriors for the Reich instead) had created the "feuerball" or the "kugelblitz" to knock

American planes out of the sky. Since we've learned all about the Nazi flying saucers, it's interesting to realize that they (and the later sightings over Mount Rainier in 1947) were explicitly described as brass-colored. Or, rather, the color of amber. If the Nazis developed some magical or Tesla-technical way to release the inherent "elektra" (or vril, or scalar plasma, or antigravity ions) within amber, they'd need a lot of it to create a UFO fleet capable of taking down the Allied air forces.

"The hovel, containing the lost Amber Room (Yeltsin keeps insisting that he knows where it is, the Bernsteinzimmer, *of which only photographs remain) and the History of the World, stood on a freakishly shaped knoll, very far from the sea."*
-- Peteris Cedrins, *The Penetralium*

So it's a good thing they had the Amber Room. Built in 1712 for King Friedrich Wilhelm I of Prussia, it took six tons of Persian (likely Lebanese) amber to construct it. The entire 1,000 square foot room was paneled, decorated, and furnished with amber to create a golden chamber suffused with an eerie, almost magical light. In 1716, Friedrich Wilhelm gave it to his guest and ally, Tsar Peter the Great of Russia, who removed it to the imperial palace of Tsarskoye Selo south of St. Petersburg. Catherine the Great added four marble Florentine mosaics (from the villas of the also amber-collecting Medici) and numerous mirrors (to reiterate the moon connection?) to the Room in 1775. In 1941, with the Nazis advancing on the palace, the Soviets disassembled the Amber Room and packed it for shipment east -- when the Germans attacked and it fell into Nazi hands. The Nazis reassembled it in the old Teutonic Order capital of Koenigsberg, which is interesting given that the Teutonic Knights (contemporaries and rivals of the Templars) jealously held the Imperial monopoly on harvesting amber from the Baltic. Heinrich Himmler, of course, was obsessed with the occult heritage of the Teutonic Knights, rebuilding their castles according to mystic geometries all across Germany -- including Koenigsberg. Which just may be why the Amber Room disappeared without a trace in April of 1945. One of the Medici mosaics has resurfaced in Bremen, but the trail to the Amber Room itself was a dead end.

"Midonz, with the gold of the sun, the leaf of the poplar, by the light of the amber,
Midonz, daughter of the sun, shaft of the tree, silver of the leaf, light of the yellow of the amber,
Midonz, gift of the God, gift of the light, gift of the amber of the sun,
       Give light to the metal."
-- Ezra Pound, "The Alchemist: Chant For The Transmutation of Metals"

A chamber made completely of amber, vanished from view in the midst of a desperate retreat. Surely in any decent game, there's yet more to this story. Amber's magic is powerfully bisociative and alchemical, being both solar and lunar simultaneously. The Egyptians used it as a dessicant in some mummies, identifying it with death and preservation. The Scythians may have used it as a lamp for the dead, a rare frozen piece of sunlight that could follow a shade into the afterworld. The Romans believed that it cured diseases, especially of the neck and throat.

So let's see what we can do with amber in a good old fashioned game of alien conspiracy. Some of the amber contains nanotechnological control matrices left by the Reptoids before the asteroid hit 65 million years ago. Some of it contains the powerful chemically-engineered secretions (tears?) of the godlike ancient-astronaut Loi (such as Apollo), which can be released through parachemical or psychic means. Some of it contains miniature clone warriors of the Mantid ultraterrestrials, the feared Insect Gods who dwell in the interstices of the dimensions. Ancient tribes used its magic; Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece stole it and gave birth to the West. The Loi plotted revenge from their Hyperborean fastnesses (and of course, since both Hyperborea and Thule are amber countries in the ultimate north, that Loi-Nazi connection begins as strong as ever), manipulating the barbarians to sack Rome and consolidating power through the amber-collecting Teutonic Knights. In 1712, Friedrich Wilhelm constructs an Amber Room using mystical geometry to unleash the layered scalar energies of the "elektra" but recoils at the powers he has called up, the Insect Gods from the qlippothic realms. He passes it to Peter the Great in a midnight ceremony; Peter and his heirs attempt to control its powers but have only intermitttent success. Himmler siezes it, and fears not its wrath; the Amber Room reveals to him the secrets of the "kugelblitz" and the electrostatic Nazi saucer fleet is born. The Amber Room becomes the saucers' power source, using stolen Tesla broadcast plasma power designs. Before the Soviets can destroy it, a U-Boat ferries it to [Nazi Antarctica](), where it lurks in an ice cave at the foot of the world, a new Hyperborea in the uttermost south. Can a **GURPS Black Ops** Strike Force Jason brave the cloned dinosaur dragons in the Nazi Redoubt,

and steal the new Golden Fleece -- the Amber Room -- for a new birth of heroism? Or is it a trap, which will freeze them all in the glaciers of Antarctica like so many ants in amber?

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Steven's Biggest Mistakes as GM

(Part I)

Now, the question may arise, "Why on earth would Steven take the time to tell you about his biggest Game Mastering mistakes?" Well, there's a few reasons. First, I believe we often learn more from our mistakes than our successes. Second, I want to bond with you all a bit, and rather than dote on what I've done *right*, I'd rather keep myself humble from the beginning by telling you what I've done *wrong*. That way, if, say, my ego were ever exposed to gamma radiation and grew to forty thousand times its normal size, you could remind me of the *Torg* incident and save the world.

And third, if I can keep just one of you from making these same mistakes, I'll consider this column a success.

Anyway, at the bottom of my list of big mistakes is also one of the lamest, but it killed a campaign.

I had the urge to run an *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* campaign a few years ago, and I assembled three good players to do it. I had the campaign world prepared, full of intrigue and neat ideas, I had the first half dozen adventures outlined. . . I was prepared.

I ran a great round of solo adventures, and we met for a great group adventure before the campaign fell apart.

Because by then we realized that, in the "real world," one player worked only days while the other worked only nights. Their schedules were completely polar; there was *no way* we could meet as a group consistently.

That was *real* dumb, let me tell you. And as the GM, I should have been the one who kept that from ever happening.

Another incident I remember is. . .

We interrupt this column with an important bulletin.

The Slushpile is dead. Repeat: The Slushpile is dead.

R.I.P.

Slushpile
1998-2000

We barely knew ye. . .
ASCII to ASCII, dice to dice.

Yes, the Dreaded Slushpile is no more. With the exception of some straggler submissions I've received this week, and some mailed ones I was forwarded yesterday, every submission I received has been read, evaluated, and (more or less) personally replied to.

What does this mean?

First, if you *haven't* heard from me, then this means I don't have your submission. If you submitted something to us and have never received a reply, please send it again via e-mail pyramid@sjgames.com, and I'll read all of them by next week.

Second, if you submit now, I hope to live up to my promise of getting a response back to you within a month. Until I say otherwise, presume that's the case, and feel free to jot me a note if I haven't written back in a month.

Third, I'm probably going to be pretty picky about any new submissions.

Time for some math. Notice that we generally print about two or three articles a week. Realizing that, guess how many articles I can logically accept a week (on average), without drowning in accepted articles. That's right. . . about two or three.

Now, so far I've been receiving about ten articles a week, meaning (if I picked accepted articles out of a hat) that an article has about a 20-30% chance of being accepted. But I suspect that number is going to jump considerably now that I'm in control of the Slushpile.

To make matters worse (for would-be contributors), I currently have about sixty accepted articles. This means that I could be encased in carbonite and we'd still have enough quality articles to last five or six months. So I don't even *have* to accept two or three articles a week, if what I receive doesn't live up to professional standards.

I'll talk more about this next week (rather than finishing up my GMing mistakes column or telling my boring old *Shadis* story), but for now remember this: We are a real, professional magazine. By submitting to us, I'm holding you to the standards of professional writers. So before you send me your article, ask yourself: Is this professional writing?

Obviously I'm not asking for *Harvdale Muckity-Muck Obscure Literary Journal*-style writing. Submissions still need to be fun, neat, and/or spark our imaginations. But I **do** strongly recommend taking a hard look at your writing and asking if it's professional.

Are spelling, grammar, and punctuation correct and consistent? Does the article flow in a logical manner? If this article were taped to a computer screen on Friday, with the *Pyramid* logo peaking out over the top of it, would a passerby believe that article came straight from *Pyramid* magazine? If you can't answer those questions affirmatively, then you may want to re-read your article before clicking the **Send** button.

Now, please, *please*, **please** don't think I want to discourage you from submitting. Far from it. I love reading fresh ideas from a writer who hasn't been published yet. But the competition is fierce currently, and if I send an article back complaining about the five typos in the opening paragraph, you'll at least understand *why*.

Please read our submission guidelines. I beg you. They're at http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/writing.html, and they're quite useful if you want to write for *Pyramid*. Of particular note is the 5,000 word "boundary." I'll talk more about this next week, but if you're writing your article now and you feel you'll be going over that, please ask yourself, "Why?" If you don't have a good reason, you may want to take pains to shorten it.

Oh, and as a bonus hint, if you want to get on my good side, make sure you call me "Steven." Calling me Steve, Stevie, Steverino, or any such derivative is a fine way of making me wince. And you don't want me wincing before I read your submission.

So I'll see you next week with some tips on how to make your submissions more professional, and I'll probably squeeze in my *Shadis* story, since that also forestalls me revealing more of my biggest mistakes (including the ***Torg*** incident).

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **GURPS Basic Third Edition**, page 26.

(Two stars) "How dare you laugh -- I'll destroy you all!"

By James Maliszewski

Art by Art Today and Colored by Phil Reed

The prominence of Humaniti in the Traveller universe is no accident. As recounted on page GT10, Humans were disseminated to nearly fifty worlds over 300,000 years ago by an unknown agency, believed by many sophontologists to have been the Ancients. Only three of these many human races are considered major: the Solomani, the Vilani and the Zhodani. The rest are all classified as "minor human races."

As described in *GURPS Traveller: Behind the Claw*, the Spinward Marches are home to two minor human races, the Darrians and the Garoo. With over thirty more minor human races to choose from, most sectors to the Third Imperium will possess at least one of their own, possibly more. No matter where a *GURPS Traveller* campaign is set, then, there is a good chance that a minor human race will be present.

The question naturally arises: how does a GM deal with these minor humans? This article provides suggestions on how to use *GURPS* to create plausible minor human races, as well as advice and how to use them in your *Traveller* game.

The Same but Different

Deeply ingrained in the Traveller setting is the assumption that the independent development of jump drive is essential to classification as a major race. While Humaniti as a whole is considered a major race because of the achievements of three of its members, these three are the only ones to have acquired jump capability through their own efforts. Thus, minor human races are similar to minor non-human races in this one respect.

However, minor humans have several advantages over minor non-humans, both within the setting and within the game. First, they share a biological heritage with the major human races. This enables them to move more easily within the Imperium. They're not viewed as "aliens" except by the most bigoted of Solomani. Most minor humans can generally blend into the mass of Humaniti and advance within Imperial society. (There are exceptions, of course, and these exceptions sometimes provide interesting opportunities for a Traveller game.)

Second, minor humans, however unusual, are still humans. Certain basic facts will remain true, no matter how much they've diverged from the Solomani-Vilani norm. These are mostly facts of biology -- like reproduction or being bipedal -- that will prevent truly bizarre divergences. This makes using them as characters much easier than using non-human aliens.

Yet, as we know from our own world, not all humans think alike. Society and culture have a profound impact on the way we look at the world and how we interact with others. Minor humans, who've developed for 300,000 years away from Earth, will likely have cultures and ideas very different from anything we've seen before. Just look at the differences between the Solomani, the Vilani and the Zhodani and you can get a sense of some of the diversity that's possible among humans.

Building a Better Human

So, what does all this mean in *GURPS* terms?

Minor humans should be created like any alien race, using the
racial package rules found in *GURPS Compendium I*, *Aliens*
and *Fantasy Folk*. These will provide the basic outlines that
any GM needs before he begins the task at hand. GMs will
also find *GURPS Bio-Tech* useful as well, as it details a
number of genetic alterations to the human genome that might
appear in minor human races.

Some minor humans might have altered attributes. The
conditions on their homeworld should be taken into
consideration here. For example, humans from a high gravity
world are more likely to have increased ST than HT. Any of
the attributes could reasonably be modified, but there must be some justification for it -- even if that justification is
simply Ancient genetic meddling! In general, though, minor humans shouldn't stray too far from the *GURPS* attribute
baseline. Modifiers greater than +2 or -2 will be rare. When they do occur, the GM should have good reason for doing
so.

Related to this are alterations to the basic height and weight chart included on page B15. Different minor humans
might tend toward certain physical shapes, being taller or lighter than the Solomani-Vilani norm. The Darrians of the
Spinward Marches, for instance, are slightly taller than Imperial humans, while the Suerrat are shorter.

Choosing Advantages and Disadvantages for minor humans should be done with care. Remember, you are choosing
them for every member of that human race. Not only should the advantages and disadvantages be believable, but they
should also be kept to a reasonable point cost. Players often do not appreciate playing members of a race whose initial
point cost eats up the bulk of their starting character points. This is merely a guideline. Some very unusual minor
humans may be divergent enough to warrant a high point cost. In the end, ask yourself: does it serve the story? Does it
add anything to the Traveller game I want to run?

When choosing racial advantages and disadvantages, always bear in mind that minor humans have only be separated
from Earth for 300,000 years. While this is a great deal of time, it's not long enough for any of them to have evolved
into forms that differ radically from their Terran counterparts. Thus, things like horns or wings or a third eye are
impossible without the intervention of Ancient genetic engineering. Even then, many physical advantages would
remain implausible. Some of the parahuman packages described in the sidebars of *GURPS Bio-Tech*, pages BIO36-
56, could be used as the basis for minor humans, although the weirder ones (like the Lepus and Camazotz series) are
not appropriate for a Traveller campaign.

Still, minor humans needn't look just like your average Joe Earthling. Gravity, weather conditions, spectral type of the
home star and other local conditions can alter the physical appearance of a human race over 300,000 years. Some
minor humans will thus look quite different from their ancient forebears. Some might not even be interfertile with
other humans as a result. Thus, a GM should take into account several factors in determining the physical appearance
of a minor human race.

Mental advantages and disadvantages are somewhat easier to accommodate. Even so, their existence requires an
explanation. A minor human race with racial Eidetic Memory might be interesting, but why would such an ability
evolve? If it didn't, why did the Ancients engineer it in them?

The bulk of mental advantages and disadvantages are quirks or personality traits. These traits, described on page
CI180, can be very useful in defining the broad mental make-up of a minor human race. The Irhadre of Lishun sector,
for example, prefer to work in groups and dislike being alone. They thus gain the Chummy [-5] trait.

Again, it's a good idea to avoid choosing extremely impressive or deleterious advantages and disadvantages for minor human races. That's why the personality trait system in **GURPS Compendium I** is recommended. As always, use common sense and never include anything without a good reason -- whether that reason be pseudo-scientific or dramatic. There's nothing worse than an ultra-powerful species with no justification for its abilities.

Because one of the hallmarks of minor humans is their cultures and societies, many will possess social advantages and disadvantages too. In particular, they may have Social Stigmas or Reputations in the Imperium. The aforementioned Irhadre keep half their adult population in a form of ritual slavery. This naturally gives them a Reputation -2 [-10] among those who know they're Irhadre and do not understand this odd cultural practice.

Building Better Cultures

In the end, **GURPS** provides more than enough rules to model almost any minor human in game terms. The real difficulty is creating a plausible culture for them.

It was already mentioned that culture sets minor humans apart from the Imperial mainstream as much as their physical appearance. We know from **GURPS** Traveller that there are several "cultural regions" within the Imperium, including the Darmine cultural region in Zarushagar. This suggests that there are pockets within the Imperium that retain elements of previous cultures in much the same way that provinces of the Roman Empire did not simply abandon "the old ways" once their lands were annexed. In some of these areas at least, a minor human race or two might hold sway.

In creating the details for a minor human culture, there are plenty of questions to answer, but not all of them need be answered for the purposes of the game. To get you started, here are a few of the more cogent ones:

- What sort of government does the race favor? Why do they favor it?
- Does the race enjoy the company of its own kind? Is it open to outsiders?
- Do religious or philosophical belief play a major role in the culture? How have these beliefs adapted to the reality of star travel and other sophont races?
- Is the race slow to change, like the Vilani, or are they great innovators, like the Solomani?
- Does the race have any customs that make interacting with them difficult? Do they have a strict code of honor or a belief in ritual purity?

These are only a few of the many questions that a GM should consider in creating a minor human culture. Concentrate on those elements of the culture that have an impact on the game. The ritual slavery of the Irhadre, for instance, has a profound impact on the way they'll appear in a **GURPS Traveller** game. The same is true of the Darrians' love of knowledge and learning.

When in doubt, look at some of the cultures of Earth and adjust them to the realities of the Traveller universe. The Vilani attempt to maintain their empire by denigrating innovation has antecedents in Chinese attempts to do the same. The Geonee protestation about their classification as a minor race can be seen in dozens of cultures that resent being patronized by "superior" Western powers. Other examples are easy to find.

Examples, Examples

To show you how to use the principles discussed in this article, here are two examples of minor human races, both from the Spinward Marches. The first example, the Darrians, is a straightforward one, since we know a fair amount about these humans. The second example, the Garoo, is more difficult, since we know very little about them. Both provide the GM with models to follow in creating his own minor human races.

The Darrians

As described in **GURPS Traveller: Behind the Claw**, the Darrians are a peaceful people who prize learning and knowledge. Darrian cultural heroes are thus great teachers and researchers. Darrians tend to have knowledge-based

hobbies where a Solomani might have a sport-based one. Darrians are tolerant of anyone (whatever their race) who chooses to live by Darrian cultural values.

Physically, Darrians are on average somewhat taller than the human norm. They have slightly pointed ears and an appearance some describe as "elfin." Despite their slender appearance, they're actually stronger than typical humans, but a little less dexterous. A greater proportion of Darrians is ambidextrous than other humans.

These two short paragraphs provide us with most of the information we need to create a racial package for the Darrians. Their peacefulness does not qualify as true Pacifism, as Darrians will use force to achieve their ends when necessary. However, some Darrians might possess Pacifism as part of their personal beliefs.

The Darrian love of learning and knowledge gives them a +1 bonus to learning both hard and soft science skills [12 points total]. The Darrian tolerance extends only to those who accept their values. Thus, it does not qualify as true Xenophilia or even being Broad-Minded.

Darrians have +1 ST and -1 DX, which neither costs nor gains character points. Their greater height means that a GM should add 2" to the height they should have based on their ST. Ambidexterity is more common among them, but not all Darrians are ambidextrous. Therefore, it is not part of the racial package.

Thus, the Darrian racial package costs a total 12 points, which is in keeping with the fact that they do not diverge too greatly from Solomani-Vilani norms. At the same time, this very brief analysis of Darrian physiology and culture has provided us with enough information to make these minor humans different than your average Imperial human. This is as it should be.

The Garoo

Our second example also comes from *GURPS Traveller: Behind the Claw* and is a much harder case. The Garoo are described as a minor human race who are more or less identical to Imperial humans. Their form of government is democratic and has been for millennia, although fear of the nearby Darrians has led to the creation of a War Council to oversee their affairs. The environment of Garoo is frozen and most Garoo now live in sealed habitats.

This description provides very little with which to work. Moreover, the similarity of Garoo to Imperial humans makes one wonder they were even created in the first place. That is, they serve no obvious game purpose other than as weak counterweights to the growing power of the Darrians. Given that we know the Solomani were active in this area 1500 years before the Third Imperium was founded, were the Garoo even necessary?

I'd be inclined to eliminate them, but they're part of *GURPS Traveller* continuity now. As such, we have to deal with them and find a way to make them interesting. Physically, the Garoo are almost identical to Imperial humans. However, the cold climate of their homeworld (on which they existed for thousands of years before the Solomani came) suggests they must have found some way to adapt. This is a form of Temperature Tolerance that makes them comfortable at temperatures as low as slightly below freezing [6 points]. Other than that, they are no different than Imperial humans.

What about their society, culture and psychology? Do any of them give them any advantages or disadvantages? Not obviously. However, with some thought, we decide to grant them racial Common Sense [10 points]. Living under harsh conditions, they adopted democracy as a way to unite their people and face challenges together. Now that the Darrians are perceived as a threat, they have altered their government slightly to meet the challenge. The Garoo thus come across now as a pragmatic people, willing to adapt to new situations -- much more interesting than the bland description given in Behind the Claw.

Individual Garoo might actually hate or fear the Darrians, resulting in Intolerance or a Phobia, but every Garoo doesn't possess these. Thus, they are excluded from the racial package. In the end, it costs 16 points to play a Garoo.

Further Considerations

The Third Imperium knows of approximately forty minor human races in all of Charted Space, over twelve of them within 60 parsecs of Vland. This makes them a rare commodity and not one to be squandered needlessly. Like all aliens in the *Traveller* setting, minor humans should be used for a reason. A GM should always ask himself: what does a minor human bring to the game that can't be brought by another human? What unique effect do I want to create?

As in the examples above, a GM need not have all the details of a minor human culture and society worked out in order to use them. The level of detailed needed varies with the use to which the culture is put. The oft-mentioned Irhadre require a GM to understand their tradition of ritual slavery -- why it exists and what it entails -- to use them effectively in a *GURPS Traveller* game.

Moreover, it's traditions like that which lend themselves easily to game use. A *Traveller* game using the Irhadre would have to grapple with many topics of philosophical import. What is the nature of freedom? Why does the Imperium believe slavery is wrong? Is it right to do so? What does this all mean to me? Thus, the Irhadre minor human race can be a catalyst for an exciting (if introspective) sort of adventure. In much the same way, the Darrians enable the characters to deal with a naturally peace-loving and thoughtful race coming to terms with instability that sometimes demands violent action.

Minor human races give the GM many opportunities to liven up his campaign. They offer a chance to explore the diversity of the Imperium and the mysterious legacy of the Ancients. If created well, they enable players and GMs alike to realize that sometimes humans can be aliens too.

Gygan Wanderer

By C.A. Johnson

Art by Art Today and Colored by Phil Reed

Age 36, 7'9", 320 lbs.; Sun darkened skin turned leathery from exposure, hair a light, sun bleached brown, eyes hazel.

Supporting Cast: Gygan Wanderer

ST: 10
DX: 11 [10]
IQ: 14 [45]
HT: 11 [10]
Speed: 5.5
Move: 5
Dodge: 5
Leather armor (PD 1, DR 1)

Advantages: Magery 2 [25], Absolute Direction [5], Animal Empathy [5], Literacy [10]

Disadvantages: Pacifism (Self-Defense) [-15], Demophobia (Mild) [-15], Gigantism [-10]

Skills: Animal handling-16 [8], Area Knowledge (Four nations appropriate to the campaign)-14 [4], Astrology-11 [1/2], Bard-12 [1/2], Climbing-12 [4], First Aid-13 [1/2], Languages (pick three, one of them a "Common" Tongue)-13 [3], Leatherworking-13 [1/2], Naturalist-15 [6], Navigation-17 [10], Packing-14 [2], Riding (Beast of choice)-15 [16], Staff-11 [4], Tracking-13 [1]

Spells *(All at 15)***:** Beast Soother, Beast Speech, Create Water, Forest Warning, Ignite Fire, Lend Strength, Lend Health, Hide Path, Minor Healing, Pathfinder, Preserve Food, Purify Water, Recover Strength, Seek Food, Seek Plant, Seek Water, Test Food [32]

Quirks: Wanderlust, Dislikes children, Vegetarian, Relates everything to "Life's Journey," Will not enter any population center larger than a hamlet. [-5]

Total Points: 133

Weapons: Staff, dressing knife.

Gygan Wanderer spent his early years in a small village at the edge of civilization. His large size assured that he would stand out among the other children. Had his strength matched his frame, he would have been fine. Alas, his height was that of the scarecrow; impressive enough, but with no real strength backing it. The other children were quick to realize this.

Children can be cruel.

The only peace Gygan ever found was in the wilds around his birthplace. The birds didn't care that he bore more resemblance to a tree with a cloak than a person. The animals, if they bothered with him at all, treated him with cautious indifference. The trees . . .the trees just continued whispering their secrets to the winds. He began to spend more and more time in the wilds. The children that had tormented him became adults that didn't understand him, and he felt no need for their company. He never got lost. He could feel where the village of his birth lay. It simply wasn't

home.

He was a young man when he first encountered the Rangers. He'd heard of them, of course. Few on the fringes of the Realm hadn't. It was their swords, their skills, and in some cases their magic, that kept the borders secure. There wasn't a hearth for miles around that didn't have stories of the Rangers told near it. They parleyed with Dragons, guarded travelers, and battled the monsters beyond the frontier. In a way, encountering them was a disappointment. The legends he'd heard so much about were only people, after all. But what people! They knew so much! They could name all the plants he knew of, and hundreds besides. They knew which healed, which helped fevers, which caused twisted dreams. They knew the animals, in many cases by name. Gygan was astonished at the depth and breadth of their wisdom. When one among them, a Mage who saw potential in the tall youth, asked him to join, he could not say "yes" quickly enough.

Never a warrior, and lacking Dragons to parley with, Gygan found himself drawn to the third function of the Rangers. He became a guide, and with his natural gifts, a very talented one. His pay also draws customers to him. He asks for no gold or silver. What use are they in the wilds? Clients merely buy what few supplies he needs for him, and while on the journey itself, teach him something. Anything. Songs from their childhood, skills they picked up, a new move with his staff, languages, spells. It matters little to this gentle giant. All knowledge is but a step on his journey.

Quotes:
"All journeys begin with a single step. Take this one with me, and I will see you safely to your destination."

"Town? Perhaps it would be best if I stayed here."

Adventure seeds

- The most obvious use for Gygan is as a guide to a place the characters have never been. The characters meet him on the outskirts of the town and begin their quest. He will prove a most able guide, and a pleasant one. He will not involve himself in politics, nor will he allow the characters to become too close. A wanderer has few real friends.
- Someone approaches the party, saying a man at the edge of town wishes to meet with them. It is Gygan. A party he guided has gotten into trouble that is beyond the giant's ability to deal with. He wants to hire the characters to help him rescue them. He has no money of his own, but assures the party that his former clients will reward them if they are saved.
- As above, but the party Gygan brought is the source of the trouble. Gygan feels responsible, and wants the characters to help him clean up his mess. In return, he will travel with them for a time, lending aid where he can. If that is not enough, he will offer to lead them to a great reward. He cannot be specific.
- The party learns of a group of miscreants traveling elsewhere to wreak havoc of some kind. They are under the protection of Gygan Wanderer, who is unaware of their intentions. The party must somehow try to overtake the group. This is no easy task since Gygan can allow them to travel long into the night, should they wish, and they only rarely have to stop for food or water.

Pyramid Pick

[Forgotten English](#)

Published by Quill

Written by Jeffrey Kacirk

240 pages, $11.00

The devil, they tell me, is in the details.

If so, then he isn't in any of the roleplaying games that I've read. I've just finished *Forgotten English* by Jeffrey Kacirk and it's made me realize how inadequate most roleplaying backgrounds are.

For example, in the eighteenth century unscrupulous traders would sometimes administer to a horse a suppository made of raw ginger in order to hide lameness of the hind legs. In extreme cases they might use a live eel! Not only that, but this was a common enough occurrence that it had its own verb: to feague.

So when was the last time your players bought a horse? And what happened - they flipped to the shopping list section of the rule book and handed over the cash. Voila! One horse. Simple and painless, yes. As much fun as a ginger suppository? Perhaps I'll let you answer that.

Forgotten English is a curious collection of antiquated words, most of them now long out of use (but more than a handful still readily identifiable). No, it's not a roleplaying supplement; it's an ordinary book brimming with arcane source material for any historical or fantasy game.

If *Forgotten English* were merely a list of strange words and their definitions, it would be pretty good. Take, for instance, bytesheip, fotadl, dilligrout, or farctate. These are words to savor, to enjoy. These are words to put in the mouths of peasants and other npcs; genuine words - not just a made up collection of vowels and consonants. Happily, *Forgotten English* is more than that. Where the book really scores is in the insights it gives into life in days gone by.

In the Middle Ages, if a prisoner could read the first verse of the 51st Psalm, he would often be pardoned! The only catch was that he had to read it in Latin - a language closely guarded by the Church. This loophole arose because the clergy were supposed to be punished by divine authority, when in fact the Church treated their misdeeds with unjust leniency or overlooked them completely. Just the sort of thing you need to know when your dishonest cleric's past finally catches up with him!

Of course, *Forgotten English* doesn't contain adventure seeds. But then it doesn't need to - they appear as if by magic.

The Bone-Fire was a summer pagan ritual in which animal bones were burned in order to drive away evil spirits. This is where we get our term bonfire. This begs the question, what do the peasants in your fantasy background do to drive away evil spirits? And does it work? Perhaps different bones are required to repel different spirits. When the peasants run low on ant-bear vertebrae, guess who gets to go and find some more?

Ambergris is a grayish waxy substance that was at different times thought to be sea mushrooms, fish excrement or solidified rays of sunlight. It was prized as a powerful aphrodisiac, a fragrant drug and as a cure for falling sickness. It would certainly be an appropriate subject of a quest, or the rare ingredient for a magical potion. "Bring me the breath

of a sinner and an ounce of unrefined ambergris, or the Prince will be dead within a month." And what are the players looking for? Ambergris is really a secretion from the intestines of sperm whales - although I think they should try for some of that solidified sunlight first.

What *Forgotten English* really brings home is how different the past was. Their beliefs, their outlook on life was far stranger than any fantasy game has ever shown me. Sometimes we're all too busy ensuring our fantasy worlds are ordered and logical without realizing that the beliefs of real people can be anything but.

After all, there's nothing logical (in modern terms at least) about believing that you could absorb the sins of the recently deceased, but that's what they did in the nineteenth century. If you were worried about the state of the deceased's soul, you could hire a sinne-eater to ceremonially consume food in the vicinity of the corpse and so absorb their sins. With my fantasy gm's hat on, I wonder what sort of person (other than a poor one) becomes a sinne-eater? If they are absorbing sins, could they then become the sinner? Could you become addicted? Perhaps it's a highly regulated profession, requiring training and dedication to arcane arts. In your game - who knows?

Personally, I want to play in fantasy games where they do things different, where the beliefs of ordinary people surprise me. Where they believe that worms cause dental cavities, whether they do or not. It's something most fantasy backgrounds fail to do, although I'm not sure why. *Forgotten English* helps plug that gap - authentically!

If I had a complaint about *Forgotten English* it is that there isn't enough of it. Not enough of the strange and bizarre, not enough of the weird and twisted. It's an eclectic mix certainly, and I wonder what was left out. But I am prepared to forgive it its faults; if nothing else it has brought sinne-eating, feague-ing and crapandina (a healing-stone harvested from a toad's brain) into my games.

-- Steve Hatherley

Pyramid Review

Compact Warrior

Published by [MicroTactix](#)

Designed by Greg Poehlein and Guy McLimore

Art by Gary M. Williams

Rulebook, 2 game boards, 33 weapon cards, and 32 cardboard figures, $9.00

For many gamers, the notion of a cheap, desk-top published game brings to mind visions of incomplete rules, incomprehensible editing, and an older, wiser voice reminding them that they get what they pay for. While many $9.00 games are not worth the paper they are photocopied on, *Compact Warrior* breaks with tradition by providing a nicely detailed board game of man-to-man fantasy combat. *Compact Warrior* stands on its own as a GM-less fighting game or it can replace the combat rules of fantasy RPGs (including MicroTactix's forthcoming Simply Roleplaying game.) If you have ever dropped all the role-playing out of a game and created a few characters just to see them mindlessly slug it out in an arena, then *Compact Warrior* might provide you with a more strategic violence fix.

Compact Warrior comes with a 24 page rulebook, several sheets of weapon cards, a page of cardboard figures, and two, square-grid playing boards. The rules are clear and suffer from only a couple of editing mistakes. The black and white art is satisfactory for the game's price, however, its lines have suffered in the laser printer. The cardboard figures are sturdy and appropriate even if they have drawings on only their front sides, the reverse of each being a silhouette.

Characters begin the game with a minimum score in four statistics; Strength, Coordination, Health, and Intellect. Then they receive one to ten more points for those stats. This randomness is inappropriate for a board game, where characters should win or lose based on their choice of skills, weapons, and tactics, not based on a bad roll early in character creation. In our game, we simply set the number of additional points.

Players then choose combat and weapon skills. Finally, they take up arms and armor and set off to battle. Unfortunately, players will have to be careful when picking items, as *Compact Warrior* does not provide a mechanic that restricts equipment (other than a few Strength requirements and a limit of two weapons). Thus, there is no reason to choose a short sword because the long sword does more damage with no additional costs. If your character meets the minimum strength requirement for plate armor, there is no reason to choose leather instead. A starting purse of money and a price on each piece of equipment would add a balancing aspect to warrior creation. As it is, players will have to work together to be sure that their characters have a fair fight.

Once the fight as begun, however, *Compact Warrior* really begins to shine. Each combat round begins with an initiative roll, but unlike many other fighting systems, characters do not necessarily proceed in that random order. Initiative winners can choose to wait until other characters make their moves before acting. This adds an interesting level of tactics to *Compact Warrior*, for now you not only have to decide what to do, but also when to do it.

After the initiative rolls, each character can perform two actions in a round. There are thirteen actions from which to choose, including moving, attacking, and defending. When in close quarters, characters are limited to 6 different

choices, forcing players to be careful before closing with an opponent lest they have the wrong weapon drawn or be facing the wrong direction. Controlling character distance, combined with the shifting initiative order, gives ***Compact Warrior*** a complex strategic element missing from most RPG combat systems.

The rest of the fighting system will be familiar to most gamers. Characters roll to-hit dice rolls based on their weapon skills, then roll for damage minus armor points, and subtract the result from their opponent's health. Characters may fall during a fight, or pass out from taking too much damage too quickly. They can hide behind objects to avoid attacks and brace their missile weapons to improve their accuracy. And, if all else fails, they can simply run into each other with their shields.

MicroTactix's support for ***Compact Warrior*** is another recommendation for the game. Players can add magic to the battle with Compact Sorcerer, fight around cardboard buildings and innocent bystanders with Vyllage-on-the-Cheep, and play in various scenarios such as BAR-Barians where the only available weapons are bottles and chairs. All of these supplements continue MicroTactix's commitment to inexpensive gaming.

Although the character creation system lacks balancing mechanics and is prone to munchkin min/maxing, ***Compact Warrior***'s combat system is clear and quick while retaining strategic depth. Given its low price, ***Compact Warrior*** stands out from its desktop-published competition.

-- Brad Weier

by Stephen Kenson

Art by John Zeleznik and Colored by Phil Reed

[*Editor's note:* One of the ideas I had upon coming on board was to try and do a "crossover" issue with our sister publication *Comic Book Life*, since they had a regular super heroes RPG column and I had two good *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game* articles by the same author. I figured I had at *least* a few months to settle in before trying something odd like this.

I was wrong.

The same week I suggested it, *Comic Book Life*'s regular RPG columnist Bob Portnell got the flu. So, never being one to deny synchronicity, we pushed the crossover up to this week. *Comic Book Life* is publishing a related article entitled "Heroes by the Numbers," a point-based character creation system for the *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game*, while we're offering "Getting There is Half the Fun," vehicle rules for the same game.

Comic Book Life is currently in a "beta-test" phase, so it's free, but please don't mind any dust or construction workers.

We hope you enjoy our little experiment. We now return you to your regularly scheduled article.]

* * *

From the Avengers' Quinjets to the X-Men's super-sonic Blackbird, many heroes in the Marvel Universe make use of different vehicles to get them where they need to go. Most of the time, these vehicles are plot-devices, just ways of getting the heroes from point A to point B quickly. In one of their early adventures, before they had quinjets, it took the Avengers hours to go from New York City to the American Southwest, where the Incredible Hulk was sighted.

However, in some stories, vehicles play an important role. Some heroes, like Captain America and Moon Knight, make use of specialized vehicles of their own. Narrators can make use of different vehicles, along with action scenes like vehicle chases and combats, to spice up adventures for the *Marvel Super Heroes Adventure Game*.

Vehicle Abilities

A vehicle is a specialized type of equipment, using the standard equipment rules from the *Marvel Game Book*. All vehicles share certain abilities in common: Body, which measures the vehicle's resistance to damage and is aligned with Strength; Speed, which determines how quickly the vehicle moves and maneuvers, and is aligned with Agility; and Protection, which is also aligned with Strength, and represents how much protection the vehicle offers passengers against damage.

All vehicles have the equipment powers of Basic Movement (their Speed) and Passenger Compartments. All other abilities are optional, but common vehicle abilities include Body Armor to increase Body, Alarm and Anti-Theft

systems, Commlink (communications), Electronic Countermeasures, Homing System, Lights, and various Sensors, including Radar and Sonar.

Types of Vehicles

Vehicles come in four basic types, depending on the type of terrain they are designed for: ground, water, air, and space.

Ground vehicles are any that move along the ground, including cars, trucks, trains, tanks, and so forth. Water vehicles move on or in water, including boats, ships, and submarines. Heroes use the Driving skill to operate ground and water vehicles. (At the Narrator's option, a separate Sailing skill can exist for water vehicles.) Air vehicles operate within an atmosphere, such as planes, jets, and helicopters, while space vehicles can operate in vacuum, from space shuttles to starships. Heroes use the Piloting skill to operate these vehicles.

Air vehicles need some sort of a runway for takeoff and landing. It takes at least two exchanges for a vehicle to take off or land, longer at the discretion of the Narrator. Air vehicles can be built with VTOL (Vertical Take-Off and Landing) capability. This allows the vehicle to take off and land vertically, like a helicopter. The vehicle can also hover in place.

Taking off or landing an air or space vehicle is normally an easy Agility action. The Piloting skill lowers the difficulty to automatic. The Narrator may increase the difficulty in situations where conditions are less than ideal, such as landing a damaged airplane in the midst of a howling blizzard with no instruments. A failed take-off or landing action results in a crash.

Creating Vehicles

A vehicle is constructed like any other piece of equipment: the hero makes an Intellect action against a difficulty equal to the vehicle's highest ability, plus one per additional ability. So a car with Body 5, Speed 4, Passenger Compartments, and an Alarm system has a difficulty of 5 (the highest intensity), plus 3 (the number of additional powers), for a total of 8 (average difficulty). As always, the Narrator should set limits on vehicle abilities to suit his or her own game. If a proposed vehicle seems too powerful, even if the hero is capable of building it, ask the player to scale it back a bit.

This basic system allows heroes to design and modify most vehicles fairly easily. If desired, the Narrator can use the optional super-science rules for building equipment from *Reed Richards' Guide to Everything* to build vehicles. The Narrator can also assess a cost for the vehicle, and may call for a Willpower action with the same difficulty as creating the vehicle to purchase or otherwise acquire the necessary parts. The Finance skill lowers this difficulty by 4 points. Tony Stark finds it a lot easier to finance the construction of a new quinjet than Spider-Man.

Vehicle Rules

Vehicles are subject to some special rules. These are optional rules Narrators can use to enhance their games. If they slow things down too much, feel free to ignore them.

Rules of the Road

Driving or piloting a vehicle under normal conditions does not require an action; it's only when things get tricky that heroes need to make actions to keep their vehicles under control. This includes situations like sudden stops or turns, high-speed maneuvers, and difficult conditions (such as driving over rough terrain or flying through bad weather).

The Narrator chooses the difficulty of the Agility action to control the vehicle, although usually the action is average (easy for heroes with the appropriate skill). Success keeps the vehicle under control, while failure means the vehicle is out of control.

Out of control vehicles continue traveling in a straight line for the next exchange. The hero can try again to regain control next exchange, unless the vehicle hits something (see **Crashes**, below). Out of control air vehicles also lose five stories (about 50 feet) of altitude for each exchange they are out of control, as if falling (which, basically, they are).

A hero can also attempt to halt a vehicle from the outside. This requires an average Strength action, plus either the weight intensity of the vehicle or its speed, whichever is greater. It's much harder to stop a runaway train than it is a rolling Volkswagen beetle. So stopping a freight train (weight intensity 20) with Speed 5 is an unfathomable Strength action (20, plus 8 for an average action). So is catching a falling jet plane. Heroes can use appropriate powers like Air Control, Magnetic Control, or Telekinesis in place of Strength.

Crashes

When a vehicle hits something, both it and its passengers may suffer damage (to say nothing of whatever the vehicle runs into). A crash is similar to a charging attack; compare the lower of the vehicle's Body and Speed to the material strength of the object the vehicle crashes into. If it is greater, the vehicle breaks through the barrier and its speed is reduced by its material strength. If it's less, the vehicle comes to a halt and both the passengers and the vehicle suffer damage equal to the vehicle's Speed, plus the material strength of the object, minus the vehicle's Protection. Passengers wearing some sort of crash protection, like a seatbelt or crash harness, reduce the damage by 4 points (it pays to buckle up, kids!).

For example, an Avengers quinjet, out of control, slams into a sheer rock wall. "Crash positions, everyone!" shouts Captain America, as the wall looms closer. The Quinjet has Body 14 and is moving at Speed 8 (well below its maximum speed). The cliff is material strength 16. The quinjet crashes and everyone onboard takes 24 points of damage (Speed 8, plus material strength 16), minus the quinjet's Protection, which is 8. Everyone is wearing a crash harness, so the damage is reduced another 4 points to 12. Still, the Mighty Avengers are a little shaken up, and the quinjet has certainly seen better days.

Vehicle Damage

Vehicles can suffer damage from crashes as well as direct attacks. When a vehicle suffers damage, subtract its Body plus its Protection from the damage. If any damage remains, draw a card from the Fate Deck to determine what effect the damage has:

- Strength: Reduce the vehicle's Body by the remaining damage. If Body is reduced to 0, the vehicle is destroyed.
- Agility: Reduce the vehicle's Speed by the remaining damage. If Speed is reduced to 0, the vehicle comes to a stop (and falls, in the case of air vehicles).
- Intellect: Increase the difficulty for all actions to control the vehicle by the remaining damage. This may result in the vehicle going out of control.
- Willpower: Reduce the vehicle's Protection by the remaining damage. If Protection is reduced to 0 (or the vehicle has no Protection) reduce Body instead.
- Doom: Reduce all the vehicle's abilities by the remaining damage, as above. In addition, the vehicle automatically goes out of control. The Narrator may choose to substitute some other appropriate mishap, as desired.

Repairing damage to a vehicle requires an average Intellect action (easy for heroes with Repair or Mechanics) and a number of hours equal to the damage points. This time can be broken up however the heroes want, but the vehicle's performance remains impaired until it is fixed. Now you know why the X-Men spent so much time in the hangar bay, working on the Blackbird.

Damage to Passengers

It is also possible to directly target passengers inside a vehicle. This increases the difficulty of the attack by one level (from easy to average) and assumes the attacker can see the target. The target also gains the vehicle's Protection as Body Armor against the attack. The attack is assumed to do minimal damage to the vehicle itself, unless it is an area attack, in which case the vehicle is affected normally, as are any other passengers in range.

Chase Scenes

Vehicles use the same system of distances as heroes: Striking, Firing, and Visual Distance. Increasing or decreasing distance by one level requires a successful easy Speed action, opposed by the Speed of the pursuer. For heroes using movement powers like Flight or Lightning Speed, substitute the power intensity. For heroes on foot without any movement powers, assume a base Speed of 0 and play cards normally. A vehicle that moves beyond visual range can generally be assumed to have evaded any pursuers.

Vehicle Combat

In some cases vehicles may directly oppose heroes. Vehicles equipped with weapons can use them against heroes, doing damage normally. Vehicles can also attempt to run down or crash into heroes. Treat this as a normal crash. The hero can evade the attack with an easy Agility (Speed) action. Instead of dodging, the hero can make an average Strength action, plus the greater of vehicle's weight intensity or speed, as with an out of control vehicle. If successful, the hero stops the vehicle cold and takes no damage. If the vehicle hits, it does damage to the hero equal to the sum of its Body and current Speed and suffers damage equal to its current speed plus the hero's Strength.

Example: "Run me down, gentlemen? I don't think so," Phoenix says to the Hellfire Club mercenaries in the onrushing sedan. The car has Body 5 and Speed 4. Phoenix waves her hands and an intensity 14 telekinetic shield springs up between her and the car. The car does 9 points of damage (Body plus Speed), not enough to get through Phoenix's shield. It takes 18 points of damage (its Speed plus the intensity of the telekinetic wall). The Narrator applies the remaining 13 damage points to the car's Body, totaling it. The Hellfire mercenaries are knocked out cold by the collision.

Attacks against vehicles take place normally. Attacking a vehicle is an easy action using Strength, Agility, or an appropriate power. Avoiding an against a vehicle you're in control of is an easy Agility action, opposed by the attacker's ability. Driving or Piloting skill lowers the base difficulty to automatic.

Sample Vehicles

Ground Vehicles

Bicycle [Body 2, Speed 1, Protection 0]: Your standard two-wheeler. Also includes things like unicycles. Skateboards and rollerblades are similar, but only Body 1.

Motorcycle [Body 3, Speed 3, Protection 0]: A fairly typical motorized bike. Some models may have slightly higher Body or Speed. Passengers wearing the proper crash gear (including a helmet) reduce crash damage by 4 points.

Car [Body 5, Speed 4, Protection +2]: This is a typical car found on the road. Some models may have lower or

higher Body (from 3-6) and slightly higher Speed (up to 5). Armored limousines have Protection +4. Police cars have Speed 5 and Protection +3.

Van [Body 8, Speed 4, Protection +2]: A standard van or light truck. Police SWAT Vans have Body 9 and Protection +4.

Bus [Body 10, Speed 4, Protection +2]: A commercial or school bus. Buses rarely travel above Speed 3, except on open highways.

Semi-Truck [Body 12, Speed 4, Protection +3]: A standard 18-wheeler type truck.

Tractor [Body 9, Speed 2, Protection 0]: Large farm tractor, good for hauling and throwing at super-villains.

Bulldozer [Body 10, Speed 1, Protection 0]: Includes bulldozers and various other large pieces of construction equipment.

Tank [Body 12, Speed 3, Protection +6, +7 Cannon, +5 Machine Guns, CommLink, ECM, EMP Protection, Lights, Sensors]: Main battle tank found in variations the world over. Tanks intended to take on super-villains or giant monsters may be equipped with other special weapons or ammunition (although its more likely they're just cannon fodder to buy the heroes some time).

Train [Body 11, Speed 4, Protection +2]: Standard passenger and freight trains. High-speed bullet trains can have up to Speed 7.

Mole Machine [Body 12, Speed 3, Protection +5]: Armored vehicle equipped with a large drill-bit at either end, allowing it to tunnel through the earth. Used by subterraneans and super-villains.

Water Vehicles

Rowboat [Body 2, Speed 1, Protection 0]: This includes other small, muscle-powered watercraft like canoes and rafts.

Jetski [Body 2, Speed 4, Protection 0]: A one-person speedboat, used for recreation and by lifeguards.

Sailboat [Body 4, Speed 3, Protection +1]: A small to mid-sized pleasure craft driven by sail. Its Speed varies according to the wind. Larger sailing craft have correspondingly greater Body.

Motorboat [Body 3, Speed 3, Protection 0]: A small wooden or aluminum hulled boat with an outboard motor.

Speedboat [Body 4, Speed 5, Protection 0]: A sleeker boat with a powerful engine, the type typically seen in police shows and action movies.

Trawler [Body 8, Speed 4, Protection +1]: A mid-sized fishing boat, tug, or similar sort of boat found at docksides worldwide.

Coast Guard Cutter [Body 10, Speed 5, Protection +2]: A mid-sized boat used by the Coast Guard for patrols.

Hydrofoil [Body 8, Speed 6, Protection +2]: A fast medium-sized boat, popular with the wealthy and super-villains.

Ocean Liner [Body 14, Speed 4, Protection +4]: Standard cruise ship, menaced by sea monsters, terrorists, and super criminals.

Destroyer [Body 12, Speed 5, Protection +4, Deck Guns +5, Sonar 10]: A medium military ship.

Battleship [Body 16, Speed 4, Protection +6, Deck Guns +5, Sonar 10]: A large naval ship.

Aircraft Carrier [Body 20, Speed 4, Protection +7, Deck Guns +5, Sonar 10]: A naval ship carrying a number of fighter planes (see below).

Submarine [Body 12, Speed 5, Protection +4, Torpedoes +5, Sonar 10]: Standard submarine. May be equipped with nuclear missiles (a popular target for super-villains and terrorists).

Mini-sub [Body 6, Speed 5, Protection +2, Torpedoes +4, Sonar 8]: Miniature submarine useful for sea-exploration, salvage, and as an emergency escape route for super-villains.

Air Vehicles

Glider [Body 2, Speed 2, Protection +1]: A small, one- or two-passenger vehicle. It has the Gliding Limit on its Speed, and cannot gain altitude.

Ultralight [Body 2, Speed 3, Protection 0]: An ultralight aircraft, basically a powered hang-glider.

Helicopter [Body 5, Speed 5, Protection +1]: A fairly standard type of two-man commercial helicopter. Larger choppers have higher Body and military and police helicopters have Protection +4, Speed 6, and are armed with +5 Machine Guns and +5 Missiles.

Private Plane [Body 5, Speed 5, Protection +1]: A small single engine plane.

Biplane [Body 4, Speed 4, Protection 0]: A World War I-era plane with a light body and double wings. Currently found only in air shows, museums, and time-travel expeditions.

Corporate Jet [Body 10, Speed 8, Protection +3, Radar Sense 8]: A Lear jet or similar small passenger jet.

Commercial Jet [Body 14, Speed 8, Protection +4, Radar Sense 10]: A large commercial jet like a 747. Popular target of terrorists and aerial super-villains.

Fighter Plane [Body 12, Speed 15, Protection +4, +5 Machine Guns, +5 Missiles, CommLink, ECM, EMP Protection, Homing System, Lights, Radar Sense 12]: Military jet found in air forces all across the world.

Bomber [Body 14, Speed 13, Protection +4, Machine Guns +5, Missiles +5, Bombs (Energy Blast 12), CommLink, ECM, EMP Protection, Homing System, Lights, Radar Sense 12]: Military bomber. "Stealth" models have Invisibility 8 (to radar and detection systems).

Zeppelin [Body 6, Speed 4, Protection +2]: Gas-filled balloons with gondola decks.

Flying Car [Body 6, Speed 8, Protection +4, ten Hornet Missiles +5, two Laser Cannons +4, Radar Sense 13, four Radiation Missiles +6, Danger Sense 11, ECM 9, Ejection Seats, Flight 10]: The standard-issue SHIELD vehicle looks like a stylish roadster, but is also capable of flight using turbofans concealed in the wheel hubs.

Skycycle [Body 8, Speed 6, Protection 0]: A fast one- or two-passenger vehicle similar to a flying motorcycle, used by the Avengers.

Atomic Steed [Body 11, Speed 11, Protection 0]: A nuclear powered, one-person air vehicle developed and used by the Knights of Wundagore. Also used by the Black Knight and currently by the Thunderbolts.

Aircar [Body 10, Speed 9, Protection 0]: Open-topped air vehicle similar to a convertible. Both the Avengers and the Thunderbolts have aircars for short-range transportation. The Fantastic Four's Fantasticar is similar, but also able to separate into four individual segments, each with Body 5.

Quinjet [Body 14, Speed 14, Protection +8, CommLink, Danger Sense 14, ECM 14, Ejection 12, Radar Sense 14]: Built by the Wakanda Design Group, the famous Avengers' quinjet is a common sight over Manhattan. The

special space quinjet also has Space Flight 6.

Blackbird [Body 15, Speed 15, Protection +5, CommLink, ECM 14, Homing System, Radar Sense 14, Space Flight 3]: The sleek, black plane of the X-Men, a modified SR-71 supersonic.

Rocket Plane [Body 18, Speed 25, Protection +4, Automatic Return, Autopilot, Danger Sense 11, ECM, Ejection, Energy Blast 12 (electrify hull), Radar Sense 13, Space Flight 4]: An experimental design created by Reed Richards to replace the Fantastic Four's old Pogo-Plane.

Space Vehicles

Space vehicles, in addition to their other features, all treat their Speed as Space Flight. They provide Life Support for passengers and generally have equipment like air locks and spacesuits.

Space Shuttle [Body 14, Speed 3, Protection +3]: This is an orbital shuttle similar to the U.S. space shuttle.

Shuttlecraft [Body 10, Speed 5, Protection +2]: This is a small sub-light craft used as a lander by larger alien vessels.

Spaceship [Body 14, Speed 10, Protection +4, Lasers +4]: A small light speed spaceship or starfighter.

Starship [Body 16, Speed 12, Protection +4, Lasers +6, Force Field 8]: A small starship from any of the interstellar races in the Marvel Universe, equipped with laser cannons and a protective force field.

Space Cruiser [Body 24, Speed 16, Protection +6, Laser Batteries +8, Force Field 12]: A giant space cruiser, like those of the Shi'ar, Kree, or Skrull Empires.

History on the Rocks: Alternate Ice Ages

"Climate change at the end of these interglacial time periods is rather sharp and dramatic. Excellent historical evidence exists from areas on the European plains which once were oak forests and were later transformed into poplar, then into birch, and finally into tundra within a 100-year span."
-- CIA Report: "A Study of Climatological Research as it Pertains to Intelligence Problems" (1974)

For want of a nail, the old rhyme reminds us, the kingdom was lost. So imagine what several million tons of ice can do. In the four following alternate histories, I posit the return of the glaciers to their rough positions around 18,000 years ago at the approximate height of the Würm-Wisconsin glaciation (only slightly modified for dramatic effect). For those scoring at home, that means that everything north of a line running Tacoma-Duluth-Peoria-Long Island in North America, and slightly north of Birmingham-Amsterdam-Dresden-Minsk-Kazan in Europe, is under miles of ice. Sea levels are 300 feet lower, the Black Sea is a lake, Sumatra, Borneo, and Japan connect to Asia, and many other mountain chains (Alps, Himalayas, Pamirs, Andes) are impassably blocked. Everything in here (except the trigger for the last alternate) is legitimate geology; even the rapid onset (between 70 and 200 years, adopted to drive the ice's impact historically) isn't outside the bounds of viable theory. Each alternate begins glaciating during an unusually cold period in Real History, as can be determined from H.H. Lamb's excellent *Climate, History, and the Modern World* or Emmanuel LeRoy Ladurie's discursive *Times of Feast, Times of Famine.* As chaos theory teaches us, we're always just a butterfly flap away from climatic catastrophe -- over ice.

"The sea freezes over, and the whole of the Cimmerian Bosphorus; and the Scythians, who live outside . . . make war upon the ice, and drive wagons across it to the country of the Sindi."
-- Herodotus, *The Histories,* IV:28 (ca. 445 B.C.)

Although the theory isn't as all-encompassing as it used to be, historians once blamed the cooling period from 1200 to 800 B.C. for the fall of ancient cultures as far apart as Olmec Mexico, Mycenaean Greece, and Zhou China. Turn that cold snap into an Ice Age, and you've got a recipe for disaster. Egypt, which barely made it through the era in our history, fell to the Sea Peoples, leading to a Philistine culture of bronze-working city-states along the Nile. (The Hebrews still made their Exodus, but rapidly blended into the Aramaeans who invaded Canaan from the other direction.) The Cimmerians, likewise, plowed through the Hittites and into the Assyrians, disrupting the nascent Iron Age. Proto-Celtic cultures became more like the Eskimo as they adapt to the tundra of Western Europe, while the flukes of monsoon patterns actually permitted a large-scale Persian state to form five centuries early south of the Caspian. The result is a world more like that of **GURPS Conan** than not; the uncertain climate rewards barbarism and penalizes all but the most restrictive or autocratic city-states. (No Judaism, no Greek civilization, no Romans.) A few pastoral empires (the Persians, the Karasuk to their north, the Vedic Ganges) dwell in the east, building up surpluses of wealth as the only cultures capable of exporting food. Isolated pockets of iron-working may exist, but most weapons are bronze and wielded on little provocation. For more fantasy flavor, raise the strait of Gibraltar, and uncover vast mana wells beneath the former Mediterranean; down in the trenches, dragons and Cyclopes grow, and the lizard men plot to fall on the kingdoms of beleaguered mankind.

"I came to an immense mass of ice. As far as I could judge, it was two or three pikes thick, and as wide as the range of a strong bow. Its length stretched indefinitely upward, so you could not see its end. To anyone looking at it, it was a terrifying spectacle . . ."
-- Sebastian Münster, *Cosmographiae Universalis Libr.* (1546)

The coldest known period in recorded history, the Little Ice Age, began around 1315 with a series of famines in France and the Low Countries. In this alternate, that was the beginning of a rather bigger Ice Age -- the glaciers crept south, turning the proud national states (England, France, Castile) into bleak tundra and thin piny scrub. The Germanies, pressed hard by Scandinavian refugees, fell again into barbarism and poured over the Plantagenet domains stretching across the new lands that were once the English Channel. Italy's city-states, however, managed to keep their prosperity and increase their independence (the Alpine glaciers prevented invasion) during that parlous century, although the Turks poured across the Bosphorus land bridge and laid the Balkans waste. They found the new weather uncongenial

to campaigning in Europe, however, and left Italy to a vigorous new Renaissance. By the time Machiavelli and da Vinci's canal crossed the new salt flats to the sea from Florence, the Italian states had learned to harness the coal from the Romagna, and to trade for coal from the richer veins (worked by poorer Germans) in the Ruhr and Silesia. Da Vinci's steam-pumps clear the new coastlands for crops, and let Florence put more men into battle. Changed currents and destruction of northern shipping restricted exploration until the coal-fired galleasses of Florence's Great Navigator, Giovanni da Verrazano, made landfall on the temperate shores of Brazil in 1524. Florence, under Machiavelli's direction as Gonfalonier, rapidly became the center of an Italian League.

The setting now is **GURPS Swashbucklers-Steampunk** with a Renaissance twist. The League's musketeers trade for aurochs hides among the northern princelings, and crusade for gold in idyllic Morocco (the shifted Gulf Stream brings more rain to Casablanca and Tangier). Rumor has reached the Duomo that China, fallen into chaos after the Mongols fell to the ice, can yield up its riches to any bold condottiere with a few large coal-galleasses, a steam-gonne or two, and enough da Vinci land-tortoises to overrun peasant infantry.

"An immense glacier was on our left, which continuously rolled stones to its foot . . . We see several avalanches, some very small, others of great magnitude . . . overwhelming everything as it passed along, and precipitating great pieces of ice into the valley below. The glacier is increasing every day a foot, closing up the valley . . . This is the most desolate place in the world . . ."
-- from the Swiss journals of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley (1816)

At least the ice stopped seventy miles from London. 1816, the "year without a summer" rapidly became the "reign without a summer." George IV was forced to watch Canada fall, not to America (where power, along with cropland, moved to the South to stay) but to the all-covering ice. India rode out repeated mutinies and famines, but Britain held grimly on to its warmest dominion even as the glaciers crushed its Russian rivals. Revolts splintered the Romanov empire, as the glaciers drove Prussia (and the rest of Germany) into the Hapsburg embrace. The new Bonapartist regime in France annexed the Saar and Ruhr, to ensure French coal supplies, and now threatens England's hold on Egypt -- and the remains of England itself across the Channel-Lands. Slave-holding America (reinforced by massive Irish emigration after the British refused to open the ports when the glaciers came) and imperialist Britain duel for command of the warm, arable tropics in South America (Mexico having fallen to Presidents Polk and Quitman). The Japanese, meanwhile, have taken advantage of the exposed land bridges to Korea and Manchuria; their invasion of China coincided with the Taiping Rebellion (a decade longer in this uncertain new history) to dump the Manchu Empire into complete disarray. (The Royal Navy, unfortunately, was forced to rebuild most of its shore facilities numerous times as coastlines receded, and is still not up to its pre-Ice deployable strength.)

This world cries out for Weird Science of all sorts, in true steampunk fashion. The Ice-Borer opens tunnels to the Frozen Fortress of the Mad Baron Bismarck. The Edison Mega-Mirror holds the glaciers away from Chicago to keep the rails open. Judicious injections of mountain-gorilla gland extract enable Her Majesty's Own Caledonian Glacier Guard to keep a watch for Ukrainian infiltrators crossing the Hindu Kush. The retreating Aegean seacoast reveals an Atlantean colony between Crete and Athens. Mammoths and saber-toothed tigers return from the Hole in the Pole, and stalk the deserted streets of Bristol. Most worrisome of all, slumbering Things Man Was Not Meant To Know float south in the melting icebergs as Ithaqua's realm ever expands . . .

"Of course, the implementation of the World Ice Theory ordered by the Reichsführer-SS must be planned in accord with scientific methodology. Thus is the manner of working in the Administration for Scientific Research in the Ahnenerbe unambiguously set forth. At the same time, a change from the usual method of applying the World Ice Theory has been decided upon as well . . ."
-- Ahnenerbe-SS internal document, 9 Dec 1937

This much is true: The general warming pattern of the twentieth century was broken by a sudden cold drop between 1933 and 1941. This much is not: It was the result of Ahnenerbe-SS magics, uncovered by the Edmund Kiss expedition to Tihuanaco in 1928. In this alternate, the Ahnenerbe successfully triggered the Fimbulwinter, first stage of Ragnarok, in 1933. This set up the New Ice Age, and a swell "secret magic" **GURPS Special Ops** campaign frame. (If you'd rather avoid magic, it was the detonation of a "dust weapon" developed by von Braun to blot out sunlight -- but those glaciers are still growing awful fast.) By the war's outbreak, Moscow lay under a mile of ice, and England

battled the glaciers rather than Nazism. Franco's Spain, Mussolini's Italy, and Tojo's Japan all gained new expanses of coastal land to be worked by forced labor; France fell to the Jura glacier and the blitzkrieg in 1940. German troops poured across the steppes, eventually stopping at the Urals, but even the much vaunted Finnish Exile Legion has its hands full dealing with Chechen partisans in the oil fields at the foot of the Caucasus glaciers. (America simply fortified the Bering land bridge.) The United States absorbed nine million Canadian (and twice that many internal) refugees, but the strain cracked FDR's fragile New Deal, letting Charles Lindbergh take power in 1936. Churchill fled the Nazi panzers as they rumbled past the White Hills of Dover, and now keeps British resistance alive by sheer force of will from exile on the new Great Bahama Island. The key to maintaining British power is her ever-larger fleet of pykrete (ice and wood-pulp) super-ships developed by Geoffrey Pyke; the *H.M.S. Boreas* can launch an entire wing of Comet jet-fighters from its shaved-ice deck. Nazi rocket-planes "hop the cap" over frozen Norway to attack the British ice-fields, but run the risk of drawing America (which claims the polar cap after Byrd's explorations of it) into the war. Japan, busy with new lands to conquer (and exploit for oil) in the erstwhile East Indies, has no interest in attacking America either, so the balance of power tilts ever-farther into the cold clutches of Nazi Germany. Brrr.

Pyramid Review

Mage Second Edition Revised

Developed by Jess Heinig

312-page hardcover, $29.95 (special limited edition, $69.95)

[*Editor's note:* Within 24 hours I received two reviews of this product. Since *Mage* has always been about different viewpoints, this somehow seemed appropriate. I have edited them into two coexisting reviews that will hopefully prove useful to you.]

Kevin Brennan

There's a reason that the new version of *Mage* is called the "Revised Edition" and not the "Third Edition." Consider it fair warning. This is not really a new edition of the game. The text has been substantially rewritten, but it's only a slight exaggeration to say that the most significant change in the *Revised Edition* is the replacement of *Mage*'s signature font. The game is now far more clearly written and understandable than it ever has been before, but experienced players will find little new here.

For those unfamiliar with the game, the basic idea behind Mage is that reality is shaped by the collective beliefs of all humanity. Technology is just another form of magic, but because everyone believes in it, it works while traditional spells fail. A mage who tries to work magic that violates the collective paradigm risks a backlash of paradox that can violate physical law, inflict serious injury, or even remove the offender from reality. However, magic can also be "coincidental," meaning that the events can be explained without recourse to the supernatural, no matter how unlikely they may seem.

Characters are assumed to belong to the Traditions, a loose group from a variety of magical backgrounds. They are opposed to the Technocracy, a cabal that created and enforces our technological worldview, the Nephandi, who are servants of darkness and evil, and the Marauders, mages so insane that the restrictions of reality no longer apply.

The game has always had a slightly offbeat philosophical bent, and players have had frequent disagreements about how to handle its relatively free-form magic system. It seems that *Mage Revised* is intended to cut back on both. The musings scattered throughout the earlier editions of the game have been replaced with more obviously game-related information. Where previous editions referred to "magick," Revised drops the "special K." It's less pretentious, I admit, but somehow the pretentiousness was always part of the unique charm of the game. Mage risks drifting into the world of four-color comic books without it.

Old players of Mage will find that some of the rules have been cleaned up a little. The rules have been updated to match *Vampire 3rd*. Magic is slightly harder to cast if you're used to depending on a generous supply of Quintessence to get away with casting spells, since you can only use an amount equal to your Avatar background. Merits and Flaws are now included in the basic rules instead of confined to the outdated *Book of Shadows*. Paradox now injures a character by default, with the old paradox flaws (water running backward, blue cats falling from the sky) becoming optional.

The new edition also places more emphasis on the paradigm used by each mage. In older editions, it seemed that most mages knew that they could shape reality with the power of their thoughts. *Mage Revised* makes it clear that only experienced (well above the levels of starting player characters) know the truth about how magic works, and all others honestly believe that their way of doing things is the truth. Characters must now have an Arete (the attribute that measures their understanding of reality) of 6 before they can begin to discard the trappings of their magical style. This

will typically only happen in long-running games.

One new mechanic that seems to have not quite been fully thought out is Resonance. This is supposed to add to the feeling of ambiance by forcing mages to shape their magical effects around a theme. For example, a mage's spells may be "fiery" or "discordant." It's an interesting idea, but a lot of the examples given seem to assume the characters are tossing fireballs around or in some other way burning up their special effects budget, which seems to go against the subtlety demanded elsewhere in the game. In addition, the magical powers of an average mage are so flexible that I find it hard to imagine a Resonance that could be consistently applied.

The description of how coincidental magic works has been given a new twist that will hopefully help settle the endless debates among *Mage* players. The *Revised Edition* now implies that the form that coincidental spells take is determined by the universe, not by the individual mage. This gives the Storyteller a lot of latitude to keep the effects and improbabilities down to whatever their personal level of comfort may be.

Stephen Kenson

Physically, the revised edition of *Mage* is beautiful, a hefty hardcover with glossy, heavy-stock pages. The layout is clean, attractive, and readable, and the artwork is excellent and blends well with the text, enhancing rather than detracting from it. The special limited edition (for you collectors) features a leatherette cover with gold foil embossing and a purple cloth bookmark, making the book look like a tome worthy of the library of a real mage. It comes in a slipcase cover, along with a softcover art book that collects some of the best art published for Mage.

Inside, White Wolf has clearly learned a great deal about organization since *Mage*, first edition. The book has a Prologue, entitled "Through a Darkened Mirror," that neatly lays out all the basic information about the world of the mage in narrative form. This is the sort of thing *Mage* was missing; a straightforward, "What's it all about?" section. From the very beginning the revised edition brings *Mage* down a notch or two from its lofty heights to the streets and alleyways of the World of Darkness. The Ascension War is over, and the Technocracy has won, but even the Technocrats are starting to realize things aren't turning out the way they'd hoped.

A key point is that White Wolf seems to be downplaying the highest power levels of *Mage* with events that have cut Earth off from the Umbra and the higher realms, making it hazardous to travel between then, and taking the most powerful mages out of the game. This leaves the newbies (the player characters) to take care of things. I personally found the idea refreshing--it made me want to start a *Mage* game--but long-term players may find these events upsetting their ongoing chronicles (which may or may not be just what their chronicle needs). The changes in the revised edition are often subtle and experienced *Mage* players should read carefully in order to catch them all.

The first two chapters introduce (or re-introduce, for long-time players) the World of Darkness from a mage's perspective and the Nine Traditions of mages. These chapters (like most of the book) benefit from years of *Mage* source material. The Tradition pages, for example, nicely summarize information from White Wolf's Tradition Books, giving the Traditions additional depth and covering recent events in the World of Darkness, many mentioned for the first time in this book. For example, some of the disparate Crafts (splinter magical groups) from sources like *The Book of Crafts* have allied themselves with different Traditions, creating new sub-factions and additional sources for character ideas and conflict among the Tradition mages.

The next two chapters cover character creation and the elegant and flexible magic system that is at the heart of the game. Both provide detailed, step-by-step systems with plentiful examples, making building a mage character and using magic in the game easier than ever. The cosmology of the mage, and how it affects the game, is explained in detail. These chapters feature some rules upgrades, particularly in the magic section, which has clearer explainations of what magic is, how to use it, and some refinements on the different sphere levels from *Mage Second Edition*. The Prime sphere in particular is revised and expanded to include additional effects and the capabilities of all the spheres are clearer and more defined, without limiting the flexibility of the system.

Chapters Five and Six provide the Storyteller rules and how to use them in *Mage*. These cover a wide variety of actions and situations (including combat) and highlight the flexibility of the Storyteller System in relatively few pages.

They feature the revised botching rule (making catastrophic botches less likely for characters with high dice pools), new multiple action rules, and a nice section on common actions and systems for handling them.

Chapter Seven provides a history of mages and their conflicts, from the ancient past to the present day, including new recent events in the World of Darkness. The history, although necessarily brief, is expanded from material in previous editions, and provides a valuable context for the modern-day clash of mage factions.

Chapter Eight offers useful advice for *Mage* Storytellers. The chapter covers the usual basic Storytelling advice, but does it in a useful, easy-to-read manner that even experienced Storytellers can get something out of it. The chapter focused on themes and conflicts, and offers advice on getting a new group of characters together.

Chapter Nine provides information on antagonists, from enemy mages to other supernatural beings from White Wolf's World of Darkness games (vampires, werewolves, etc.). Notably absent from this chapter (and, indeed, from most of the book) are details about the omnipresent Technocracy and its agents, ostensibly the main bad guys of *Mage*. Information on the Technocracy is better integrated than previous editions, but sparse (the book only devotes two pages to them, along with some scattered references). A reader would have a difficult time naming the Technocracy's five Conventions and what they do, since they aren't specifically described anywhere. More advice on using the Technocrats-as both antagonists and characters-would also have been appropriate.

This is my biggest (and, for the most part, only) real criticism of the game. Storytellers can always pick up White Wolf's excellent *Guide to the Technocracy* sourcebook, which provides all the information one could possibly want (and then some). But it would have been nice to have some more of the basics-like stats for a typical HIT Mark or Man in Black-in the main book, along with an overview of the Technocracy's Conventions. Hopefully the upcoming *Storyteller's Companion* will address this issue.

Conclusions

If you found previous versions of *Mage* difficult to understand, or you've never played the game, the *Revised Edition* is worth checking out. It's a much more straightforward and understandable introduction to a complex setting than any earlier version. However, with the exception of a few minor tweaks, the game is largely unchanged from *Second Edition*. The fonts, art, and text have been replaced but the conception is the same. If you have *Second Edition* and are comfortable with it, there's no reason for you to get the upgrade.

-- Kevin Brennan

Overall, the revised edition is an improvement in the organization, presentation, and style of *Mage* and fixes a number of small but often important rules, such as the botch rule and the sphere definitions. Gamers who have avoided picking up the game because they were turned off by its complexity or steep learning curve should give the revised edition a look (keeping in mind they'll probably need the *Guide to the Technocracy* to get full use out of the technocrats). Experienced players and Storytellers will find a wealth of information collected together in one place, numerous rules fixes and small improvements, more detailed information on previously less developed portions of the game (like resonance and magical talismans), and many cleaner, more useful reference tables and charts.

The Ascension War may be over, but the World of Darkness needs heroes now more than ever.

-- Stephen Kenson

My Shadis Story

All right; this week I promised to tell you all the *Shadis* story. So here it is. (And I also promised more information on writing for us. It's here too.)

I'd been reading the role-playing game magazine *Shadis* from almost its beginning; my collection goes back to issue nine or so (1993, for those of you keeping track. . . I wonder if this ***Magic: The Gathering*** is going to catch on?). It had been my favorite RPG magazine for a while, coming out more regularly than *Pyramid*.

But then something happened. I'm not sure what, exactly, but the magazine seemed to fall in quality, or at least change into something I didn't really care about. I stopped reading.

And then, several months later, I picked up an issue at random. (Issue #27, to be precise.) I read it cover to cover. And it was fabulous.

So I wrote them a letter.

(An aside: I'm a letter-writer. I'm one of those odd folks who, if I have horrible service in a restaurant, or a product doesn't live up to my expectations, or my detergent eliminates a stain I thought would *never* come out, will usually write a letter. The folks I write to usually write back. I firmly believe most organizations want to know what they're doing right and wrong. . . so I'm more than willing to give them my opinion.)

Anyway, I wrote *Shadis* a letter; and in it I basically said what I said above; the magazine started great, became bad, and had a very good issue. I outlined exactly what I liked about the issue, what I disliked about what they'd done in the past, and so on. I begged them to ensure this issue wasn't a fluke, and, to give an example of what I like to read, outlined what I thought would be a "perfect" issue, complete with article ideas. I'd also included a SASE, in case they wanted to mail me a response or a dead rat or something.

About a month later, I received the SASE back, stamped with a *Shadis* return address. Inside was a letter:

Random Thought Table: My Shadis Story

This was easily the coolest letter I have ever received in the mail.

I didn't know what to make of it; at the time, I assumed it simply meant to keep reading at the magazine, and I wouldn't be disappointed. Which was fine; maybe they'd print my letter and talk about it a bit in a future issue.

And, indeed, the magazine continued to meet (or exceed) my expectations for several months after that. So I'd almost forgotten about the letter, when issue #34 came out.

In issue #34 there was, on page 79, a black silhouette of a head with a white question mark on it. Above it, in black letters, it asked, "Who is Steven Marsh?"

It was the most startled I'd ever been reading a magazine. " RPG news. *In Nomine* review. Miniature ad. My name in **72-point font!**" I do believe I squealed like a toddler.

So I figured, "Okay. That's what the letter meant. They wanted me to watch and wait so they could freak me out while reading their magazine." I showed it off to my friends, and figured this was my fifteen minutes of fame.

I was fourteen minutes off.

The next month, issue #35 came out. There, on the cover, it proudly exclaimed, "Special Steven Marsh Issue." Put mildly, I was surprised.

The *entire* issue was written around my ideas and suggestions for the "perfect" issue, right down to the titles I'd offered. In all, three (or maybe four) articles and a request for a board game were honored. They wrote an editorial about how much they liked my letter, and detailed their six-month scheme to create *my* ideal issue.

I was stunned, delighted, and amazed. Obviously I had to buy multiple copies. And obviously the game shop I worked at sold out before I went to work that day. And obviously I special ordered a couple more. In the end, I bought my multiple copies, they sent me a box of extras, and I was inspired to write a couple of articles, both of which were accepted within a few weeks.

Shadis eventually went away, which is really too bad. Sure, *Pyramid*'s weekly dose of gaming information kept me happy, but there will always be a special place in my heart for the magazine that moved heaven and earth to give me exactly what *I* wanted.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is my *Shadis* story.

* * *

For those of you hoping to write for *Pyramid*, I promised to tell you all how to make your submissions more professional, with an eye directed towards what I wanted for *Pyramid* submissions. I'm sure that those of you interested in writing for us have already read the *Pyramid* guidelines, so you know a bit more what to do and what not to do. (If not, you may want to go do that first.)

Without further delay, then, here is my first list.

Ten Ways To Improve Your Chances At Getting Accepted

1. **Be inclusive.** An article telling people how to use their *Eric Clapton: Crossroads* boxed set when running the *AD&D* adventure *Vault of the Drow* is only going to be useful for those people who own the *Crossroads* boxed set **and** want to run the *Drow* adventure with it. An article offering general advice for incorporating music into a gaming session has a greater potential audience. Likewise, a cyberpunk adventure with advice for coverting to *GURPS*, *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0*, and *Shadowrun* is probably more likely to be accepted than an adventure irrevocably tied to either of those three.

2. **Write your articles the correct length.** When asked how long any paper or project needed to be, my high school Creative Writing teacher always answered the same way: "Make it like a miniskirt. . . long enough to cover the subject, but short enough to be interesting." (She was a very interesting teacher.) Keep this advice in mind; if an article is 7,000 words, ask yourself, "Why? What am I doing with these words that I couldn't do with a thousand less?" If you have a good answer to that question, then by all means send it in. If you don't, try to pare it down to 6,000 words and ask the question again. (By the same token, make sure your article is long enough. A 500-word article detailing the Roman Empire isn't likely to be useful.)

3. **Keep it tight; keep it thorough.** As a writer you may be thinking, "The more words I use, the more I'll get paid." This simply isn't so. If your article rambles, it's less likely to be accepted, and you won't be paid anything. Don't cut out important points just to make it shorter, but don't belabor obvious points just to meet some internal word count.

4. **Make sure your topic hasn't been written about before.** If you're writing for a specific game system, make sure you have access to all the relevant books when writing the article. If you're writing some optional rules, make sure there aren't similar rules already in the *Pyramid* archive. . . or, if there are, why yours are better.

5. **"Generic" doesn't mean "boring."** For example, a generic fantasy setting intended for any system still needs to have enough different and unique about it to spark something in my imagination. If you submit a character for Supporting Cast, make sure there's something interesting about him/her/it. A generic FBI agent isn't interesting, but an FBI agent who has secret ties to an occult organization might be.

6. **Make sure it makes sense.** If you're creating a fictional world, make certain there's no glaring illogical aspect that would force me reject it; avoid a race of Lava Men living on an iceberg for no good reason. For an adventure, make sure there's no gaping plot holes (like a parchment map found in a water-filled undersea cave). Make *certain* you've extensively playtested any alternate rules or strategies.

7. **Different is good.** I like to run a variety of articles, including those for card games, board games, and other interesting bits. While I won't print a substandard board game article just to run a board game article, the odds of writing the best board game article I receive all month are much better than the odds of writing the best RPG article I receive all month.

8. **Re-read our guidelines.** They're at http://www.sjgames.com/general/guidelines/writers/. Check out the libel and obscenity section. Don't create an adventure revolving around a real-world celebrity who goes around cursing and killing people. I will not run it. Re-read that first paragraph of your article. Make sure it's perfect. (If you scar me on the first paragraph, I'm **much** less likely to recover than if I notice a minor typo on page three.) Make sure you're not missing any words; it raises my hackles to read, "The villain will make sure the do not find him." Remember: "spell checking" is not the same as "proofreading." I don't expect everything to be perfect, but the closer it is, the greater its chances.

9. **Don't be afraid to ask.** If you have an idea that's out there, feel free to send a query to me. Although I'll probably say, "Sounds interesting; write it and send it in," I might also be able to tell you some pitfalls or problems you might run into.

10. **Surprise me.** If I knew what I wanted, I would write it myself. Follow these guidelines, or break the rules if you feel up to it.

Beyond this advice, I guess I can't say much more right now. There isn't anything I really don't like, so long as it's interesting: adventures, historical perspectives, "real world" ideas, and so on. As a couple of ideas, I'll probably weep with joy if I ever receive a *Creature of the Night* that sparks my interest. I'd love to receive an *Adventure Pizza* that was intriguing. I don't have any of the articles mentioned in my first column, with the exception of Kenneth Hite's "Return to Metro City Baghdad." (Which ran the same week as my column; coincidence or conspiracy? I think we all know the answer.) And. . .

I need reviews! Although I'll still reject a substandard review, or make you rewrite one that doesn't live up to my expectations, a quick bit of math will tell you that I print about as many reviews a week as I do normal articles. I'll probably devote a column to writing reviews at some point, but keep in mind that a review of a new, recently released product has a **much** greater chance of being accepted than one of a product released a year ago. And make sure you read previous reviews to get an idea of what they're supposed to sound like.

I hope this advice has helped some of you out there. As has been said elsewhere, I get a *lot* of submissions a week, so yours needs to be really special to stand out. Don't be discouraged by the competition; be driven by it. And, as ever,

feel free to [write me](#) with praise, curses, questions, or comments. If you'd rather it be a discussion, post to the sjgames.pyramid newsgroup. Next week I may tell the **_Torg_** story. Or maybe I won't.

-- Steven Marsh

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Last week's answer: **Sons of Ether Tradition Book** (for White Wolf's **_Mage_**), back cover.

(Three stars) "It's a great new fantasy role-playing game. We pretend we're workers and students in an industrialized and technological society."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Gaming By the Numbers

Some of the most common questions I receive in my e-mail bag revolve around the demographics of gamers: "What do we know about gamers? Who are we? What are we playing?" The dirty secret is that, well, we did not really know. Everyone who has been around for any length of time could give a general answer based on anecdotal evidence. Gamers are mostly men who own computers, etc. However, until recently we have not known the answers with any scientific accuracy. Over the last year, though, Wizards of the Coast has conducted a huge and in-depth study of games and gamers. The results bear out some of the truisms of gamer legend and lore. In some important places, however, it challenges our closely held assumptions. Moreover, some of the data point to things about gamers that I, at least, never thought about before. Today, with the kind permission of Wizards of the Coast, I am pleased to be able to report the results of this survey. So here we go: Gamers by the Numbers.

First, a word about methodology. (Note: If you took statistics in college and passed, know that the study used a statistically representative sample of 1,000 American gamers between the ages of 12 and 35. You may now go on to the next section. All others should read the rest of this bit.) The point of holding a survey, of course, is to find out what people think about a certain issue. The problem, of course, is that the results are only as representative as the original sample. The Pyramid Poll, for example, is fun, but not especially scientific, because it only shows what Pyramid readers who chose to answer the poll thought about the question. Its findings ought not to be thought of as representative of even Pyramid readers as a whole, let alone all gamers, or all Americans. Wizards of the Coast's survey got around this problem by carefully choosing their survey participants. They began by sending out 20,000 postcards to a statistically accurate sample of American households, representing 65,000 people. That is, if there are 51% women in the US, there were 51% women in the sample. Theoretically, the sample pool exactly represented America. From that "screener" survey, they were able determine the size and composition of the American gamer population. They followed up that postcard survey with a much longer questionnaire sent to 1,000 gamers who were also statistically representative. This scientific rigor allows this survey to claim that it is the most accurate picture of American gamers between the ages of 12 and 35 ever collected. (Of course, there are many players who are over the age of 35. These players were not counted in the survey and the games they favor are therefore underrepresented.)

The survey determined there are approximately 5.5 million Americans who have ever played RPGs. (For the purpose of this survey, RPGs means traditional paper and pencil RPGs, such as *Dungeons & Dragons*, *GURPS*, or *Vampire*.) About half of these people play RPGs monthly (most of the following data concern these regular players). These 2.75 million monthly gamers include 19% women, for a total population of female gamers of just over 500,000. Just for comparison, this means that American gamers are a group about as large as the population of Iowa. This should entitle us to five representatives and two senators in the US congress. Secondly, more than half of gamers (59%) are over the age of 19. The data show a mysterious dip in play between the ages of 16 and 18, a drop-off that reverses after the age of 19. Though no reason for this fact can be drawn from the data, it does bear out the folk wisdom that gamers start playing in junior high school, leave the hobby during high school, and take it back up in college.

Another classic piece of folk wisdom is that RPG players are computer literate. This latest study validates that bit of lore as well. More than half of regular RPG players say they have ever played a game on the Internet, and just over a quarter say that they play Internet games monthly. More than half of gamers reported they would like to have computer tools to help them manage their games and speed up combat. Interestingly, nearly two-thirds of gamers report using Windows machines. Fewer than 10% admitted to using a Macintosh. If this data translates into new products, computer based tools should be one of the fastest growing segments of the gaming market in 2001 (taking into account development time).

One of the survey's other goals was to learn what gamers are playing. When faced with a large list of games, and with multiple choices allowed, 66% of gamers claimed to play *D&D* monthly. The next largest game was *Vampire: The Masquerade*, with 25% of players playing monthly. *Star Wars* claimed 21% of gamers. Other games dropped off quickly - *Werewolf* and *Shadowrun* 15%, *Star Trek* 12%, *Call of Cthulhu* 8%, and *Deadlands* 5%. *GURPS* is enjoyed by 3% of all gamers each month. Now, it is true that 3% does not seem like very many players, but given the large size of the gamer population, that translates to more than 80,000 regular *GURPS* players. If they all came

together in one place, the crowd would be almost triple the annual attendance at Gen Con. Thought of another way, one out of every 1,125 Americans between the ages of 12 and 35 plays *GURPS* every single month.

Taking all gamers as a whole again, the survey shows that 42% of all gamers normally create their own adventures. Only half that many normally use adventures they find in magazines like this one. More than a quarter of gamers generate entirely new campaign material. Three quarters have ever played in a game that required detailed tables and charts. About a third have tried a diceless system. Nearly half have played live-action. House rules have been used by 80% of all gamers. Somewhat more than 85% of all gamers have ever played in a combat oriented game. (The inverse of that statistic is that nearly 15% of players have never played a combat oriented game. Wow!) In a serious blow to what I thought I knew about gamers, the survey showed that 47% of all gamers have taken the role of Game Master more than twice. Only 41% have never been a GM. I had believed that GMs were far more rare.

No matter how much a person loves RPGs, few are completely satisfied by them exclusively. Among people who play RPGs monthly, the big winner is action/shooter computer games. They are a monthly pastime for 58% of regular gamers. Just over half also play a non-collectible card game monthly. Around 43% play a classic board game, like *Monopoly*, every month. It seems that miniatures-based war games are not as popular among RPG fans. Only 17% also play these games. Even fewer gamers are frequent players of more than two categories. It seems that the fabled "omni-gamer" who will play anything, anytime, and does, is an incredibly small fraction of the gamer market. Most gamers, it seems, have one or two favorite game types that they stick with closely.

Of course, everyone knows someone who had to quit playing for some reason. The Wizards survey also learned about these people. Here again, multiple answers were possible. It seems, as one might imagine, that the number one reason given (79%) was "got too busy with other things." The second most given answer was "too few people to play with." Given the surprisingly large actual size of the gamer population, some of these 63% of former gamers ought to be recoverable simply by helping them to find each other. Lack of time was cited by 55% of people who had to leave gaming. Nearly a third of the players claimed that gaming got too expensive.

It sure can be expensive. As might be expected, players who have been in the hobby the longest have spent the most money. An average gamer who has been playing for more than five years usually can be counted on to have spent over $2,500 collecting RPG materials. Even new players, though, have bought far more than just the basic rulebook. During that crucial first year, the average player can expect to lay out $116 on books. The real wallet emptier, though, is miniatures. Regardless of time playing, an average RPG player with only a few miniatures spends about $139. Those with a large collection of lead should save up about $4,413. And that's before the hernia surgery.

The first year, as I mentioned above, is crucial. According to the survey, *D&D* players who have played for one year have about a 40% chance of playing another year. When a player has been in the hobby for over 5 years, 88% of them will still be playing the next year. This means that for every 100 new gamers, only 7 will still be playing ten years later.

All this data can be overwhelming. As such, it is easy to dismiss it as somewhat of a circus stunt. However, we as a hobby should be taking this detailed peek into our minds seriously. For example, 41% of players first pick up RPGs between the ages of 16 and 18. Yet, 60% of them will not play any longer than the first year. We should be reaching out to younger players and working on keeping them in the game long enough for them to get some idea what gaming is really about. Furthermore, the incredible crossover between RPGs and computer games, especially action/shooters, means that this could be a very profitable avenue for cross-licensing and recruiting of new players. The large number of people who quit because of a lack of players could be addressed by an industry-wide "player finder" service. And finally, we should be proud of our numbers. There are large numbers of gamers out there. We need not be ashamed of our hobby. More people play games than it seems. Let's hope that concrete evidence of our presence and preferences translates into more and better players and games.

I would like to thank Wizards of the Coast for conducting this survey and especially Ryan Dancey for graciously allowing me to reprint some of their findings in this column. They have done us a service that no other company could have done. Of course, they collected a vast amount of data, including information about Collectible Card Game players, Miniature War Game players, and lot of other segments. Those results are not included in this brief treatment

of the RPG gamer. I would also like to thank the people who wrote to me and suggested this topic. As always, if there is a question about the business of gaming you would like covered in this space, please feel free to write.

This is just a little <test>. Fnord.

Five Rings, Five Colors

By Damien Wellman

Art by ArtToday and colored by Phil Reed

I. Introduction

The planes of Dominia are many. The mages known as planeswalkers travel among them, searching for spells, artifacts, and creatures to bind into servitude. What if a 'walker happened on to a very specific plane, the plane of Rokugan? The unique magic there would be alluring and several planeswalkers would certainly attempt an invasion.

Of course, the natives wouldn't going to stand for it without a fight.

Five Rings, Five Colors is a set of rules that allow any number of players of *Magic: The Gathering* and *Legend of the Five Rings* to simulate an invasion of Rokugan by planeswalkers. 5RC assumes the players have some familiarity with both games and their rules. Throughout these rules, a *Magic* player will be referred to as a "planeswalker" and a *L5R* player will be referred to as a "Rokugani".

II. Conversion Notes

Certain traits on the cards are considered interchangeable. The convertible traits are:

Magic	= *L5R*
All black-colored cards	= Shadowlands
First Strike, Flying	= Cavalry
Creatures	= Personalities
Artifacts	= Items
Lands	= Holdings
Legend	= Unique
Power/Toughness	= Force/Chi
Tap/Untap	= Bow/Straighten

Other important conversions:

- All *Magic* cards have a focus value equal to their casting cost, to a maximum of five.
- For purposes of *Magic* cards that look for "target spell", the *L5R* equivalents are kihos and spells; *L5R* spells must be countered as they are being attached.
- Planeswalkers may never gain a province, and Rokugani may never gain or lose life, although both may gain honor.
- Any damage dealt directly by a *Magic* card must follow the same strictures as an *L5R* ranged attack - the

followers must be killed before the personality can be, although the "attack" doesn't have to occur during combat.

- Any *Magic* ability that counters or prevents something is a Reaction. Instants are Open actions, and Sorceries are Limited actions. For the purposes of Power Sink and similar "this player must/may pay X mana" cards, gold is mana, but ONLY for these cards.
- Confusingly, most *Magic* cards printed recently say "until end of turn" for many abilities, with the ability assumed to be permanent otherwise. *L5R* cards make the opposite assumption. Play the card under the assumption of the native game.
- Rule of Zero: Any attribute asked for not present on the card is zero. (Thus, all *Magic* creatures have a personal honor of zero.)

III. Victory Conditions

To represent the influence of the planeswalkers in Rokugan, the victory conditions for a player on of the two sides are slightly changed.

Five Rings, Five Colors

A planeswalker wins if he:

- is the last player remaining in the game
- begins a turn with forty honor

and loses if he:

- is reduced to zero or less life.

A planeswalker does NOT lose if he cannot draw a card, unlike normal *Magic*.

A Rokugani wins if he:

- is the last player remaining
- begins a turn with forty honor

and loses if he:

- has had all of his provinces destroyed
- is reduced to -20 honor

A Rokugani cannot win by Enlightenment. However, a Rokugani attaining Enlightenment may bring himself back up to four Provinces if below four, or add one new Province if at four or more. A Rokugani can only do this once per game.

Any other victory condition not mentioned here and not specifically banned is allowed.

IV. Setup

All players should have a deck constructed according to the rules of the parent game. (Sixty cards and four copies of any card for planeswalkers, two thirty-card decks with three copies for Rokugani.) Note that legendary cards from *Magic* are considered Unique and thus are limited to one copy in a deck. The decks should consist entirely of cards from that game, with no mixing!

Planeswalkers start with seven cards in hand and twenty life. Rokugani start with four provinces, five Fate cards, and their stronghold. For purposes of gameplay, planeswalkers have a "stronghold" with five province strength, zero gold

production, and zero starting honor, although this stronghold cannot be tapped and does not affect play otherwise.

V. Turn Sequence

1. Untap/Straighten Phase - Untap all of your cards.
2. Upkeep/Events Phase - If Rokugani, turn over face-down cards in your provinces from left to right and resolve Events. Then, attach Regions. If a planeswalker, resolve upkeep effects.
3. Draw Phase - Draw a card, either from your Fate deck or library as the case may be. (For Rokugani, the Ring of Void must be used during this phase rather than the End Phase.)
4. Action/Main Phase - Rokugani may play open and limited actions, attach followers, spells, and items, and once per turn, bow a personality for the Imperial Favor. Planeswalkers may play instants, sorceries, and enchantments, and once per turn, play a land. A planeswalker may bow a creature for the Favor, if that creature somehow has more than zero personal honor.
5. Attack Phase - You may declare an attack against a player. (See "Combat".)
6. Dynasty/Second Main Phase - If a Rokugani, you may bring into play face-up cards from their provinces. Planeswalkers may play creatures and artifacts.
7. End Phase- Discard any face up cards in your provinces if you wish,then refill them if Rokugani. All "at/until end of turn" effects wear off, in whatever order the current player wishes.

VI. Combat

Combat in 5RC is a meld of *Magic: The Gathering* "skirmish" combat and the "clash of armies" style of *L5R*. It has the following sub-phases:

A. Declare Attack - Declare which player you are attacking and ask for allies, as per *L5R*'s Declaration Segment. Allies gain two family honor once they commit a unit.
B. Assign Infantry - The attacker, and then any players who wish to ally, assign attacking infantry units. If the defender is Rokugani, the attackers must declare which province they are attacking. After this, the defender and his allies assign defending infantry.
C. Assign Calvary - Same as B, but for Calvary units.
D. Battle Action Sub-Phase - A battle occurs at each province. Starting with the Defender and continuing to the Defender's left, players may play Battle or Open actions, until all players have passed.
E. Resolution Phase - Resolve the battles in the province order that the attacker wishes. Each untapped unit deals its Force worth of damage to one opposing unit in that battle; if the damage exceeds the Chi of that unit it is killed. Two or more units may combine the damage they do in order to kill a large unit. If one side can kill all opposing units and still has leftover damage, the damage is dealt directly to the Province, as is any trample damage in excess of that needed to kill a unit. If this damage is greater than the province strength, that province is destroyed, if the defender is a Rokugani. If the defender is a planeswalker, then subtract the Province Strength from the damage and the defender loses that much life. After this is done, the attacker and defender gain two family honor for each opposing card destroyed in this fashion. (No honor is gained by allies, or for cards destroyed during the Battle Action sub-phase.)

VII. Urza and Toturi Go To War: A Sample Combat

To illustrate 5RC combat, here is a simple example between Urza, a planeswalker, and Toturi, a Rokugani.

Urza has a Grizzly Bears(2/2), a White Knight(2/2, first strike, protection from black), and a Samite Healer (1/1, tap to prevent one damage to a creature or player) in play.

Toturi has a Toku with a No-Dachi (2/2), and a Spearmen (2 Force, tap for a ranged 2 attack), and a Personal Honor of three. Toturi also has a Slidge (a 5/2 Shadowlands creature).

Urza declares his attack against Toturi. As there are no other players, no allies are involved. Urza assigns his Healer and Bears to one province. Toturi assigns all of his units to defend. Finally, Urza assigns his Knight, as a Calvary unit, to the same province as the Healer and Bears.

Toturi plays a Iaijutsu Duel, targeting Slidge and the Knight. While Slidge could not damage or target the Knight normally due to Slidge being a Shadowlands card, in this case it is the Duel doing the targeting. Urza declines to focus, and instead strikes so both the Knight and Slidge die, as both have a Chi of 2.

Urza plays a Giant Growth on his Bears, making them 5/5.

Toturi taps his Spearmen to do two damage to the Samite Healer. The Healer could, as a Reaction, tap do prevent one damage, but it would still die.

Urza, seeing a 5/5 creature to Toturi's 2/2, passes.

Toturi plays a High Morale on Toku, which will unbow the Spearmen.

Urza plays a Lightning Bolt on the Spearmen, which kills them. (Urza could not Bolt Toku, since Toku had a follower.)

Toturi passes.

Both players pass consecutively, and so the battle resolves.

The Bears deal 5 damage to Toku, and Toku deals 2 damage to the Bears. This is enough to kill Toku with his Chi of two, but the Province survives since no damage was dealt to it. Toku's two damage does not exceed the Bear's toughness of five, and so Toku is killed, with Urza gaining four honor (two from Toku, two from the No-Dachi) while the Bears live.

VIII. Optional Rules

- Give some *Magic* creatures a Personal Honor. A suggested scheme is to give White creatures two honor, Green and Blue creatures one honor, Black and Red creatures zero honor.
- In conjunction with the above, allow a planeswalker to declare a "clan color" and allow them to gain honor by paying a creature's casting cost plus two generic mana. In this case, planeswalkers should also lose if they reach -20 honor, just like Rokugani.
- Have the planeswalkers divide their cards into "Fate" and "Dynasty" decks, and play with Provinces. (In this case, land costs two generic mana to bring out and the "Planeswalker Stronghold" has the ability to bring one land a turn in for free.)
- Or, have the Rokugani play with all the cards mixed into one deck, using opaque sleeves to keep the cards from being marked, having life points, starting with seven cards, etc. They should retain their stronghold.

?

by Brandon Cope

An important, but frequently overlooked, part of the fundamentals of being a good Game Master is starting a campaign off on the right foot. While many articles have been written about fixing a campaign gone bad, few have covered starting a campaign and keeping it on track in the early stages.

This article addresses four points for a GM to follow to help keep a new campaign from derailing, regardless of whether the GM is running a new system for the first time or a familiar system with new players.

Two previous *Pyramid* articles on related topics may also be of interest to the starting GM: "Opening Moves" by Angela Deacon and "Running the Perfect Fantasy Campaign" by Mike Stackpole, both available in the Pyramid archives.

Know The Game System

This is probably the most obvious point, but is sometimes glossed over. Some GMs hastily go through a rulebook in an effort to get started as soon as possible, which is a big mistake. While it isn't necessary to memorize every rule before play (and this author don't recommend trying it, either), the GM should know the basics of the system and where things are located in the rule book. If an index isn't provided, you should make your own as you read though the book.

There are several steps the GM should go through in learning the system. First, the GM should familiarize himself with the section on character generation and go through the procedure a few times. The test characters should be of a similar power level and background to those the GM has intended for the player characters. Carefully read through resolving skill rolls; in most skill-based systems (*GURPS*, *Cyberpunk 2.0.2.0.*, etc) combat, magic, psionics, netrunning, etc. are only special-case skill uses, while in level-based systems (*AD&D*), they are usually quite different.

Next, using those test characters, make a few runs through the combat system until you are comfortable with it. If there are any advanced or optional combat rules, it would be best to wait until the players (and you!) are familiar with the basic rules before introducing them. If there are any rules for magic or psionics, these should be read through next. Finally, any remaining rules should be checked out when the GM has the time. Note that this can vary for some games; for instance, in *Call of Cthulhu* the rules for sanity loss are probably more important than either the combat or magic systems.

The GM should take notes while reading through the rulebook, even if it does include an index; writing a rule down after reading it makes recall easier than reading it alone, plus the Game Master will have a crib sheet for easy reference during play.

If the GM has run the system before and is using new or altered rules, such changes should be typed or printed out and presented to the players if they are already familiar with the (standard) system, to avoid misunderstandings later on. It might also be a good idea to give new players a reference handout describing the basic mechanics of the system.

Finally, don't plan anything grand for the first few adventures. You or your players (or both) will still be learning the system, and you don't want to complicate things too much. You don't want the rest of the campaign to be anticlimactic, either. If it's possible, a good idea would be to break the party up into small groups (1-2 players each) and run introductory adventures with each.

Know The Game World

Perhaps even more important than having a working understanding of the game system is knowing the world (or worlds) that the campaign will take place on. This doesn't mean that the GM has to know the desires, goals, and abilities of every NPC and the contents of every room on the planet. What it does mean is that the GM should know the goals, attitudes, and capabilities of the movers and shakers, as well as important NPCs that the players are likely to interact with. Basic cultural information (government type, population, technology, religion, etc.) should be worked up for each nation (or planet in a space campaign). Also, the locations of important towns, planets, ruins, alien enclaves, etc. should be noted, as well as their general inhabitants, contents, politics and legends. As a rule of thumb, anything the party could reach within a week using normal transportation (horses, starships, etc.) should be covered.

The GM should also consider how the geography of the campaign area will influence the actions of the cultures in the area. For example, migrations are unlikely to occur across mountain ranges, inhabitants of a desert world will have to get their water from some outside source, an isolated star system rarely will be the hub of an empire, and so on.

Both of these types of understanding are important to make the campaign seem real and alive to the players. If the GM is using a pre-made campaign setting, the job is a little easier, but the GM still needs to be familiar with the overall setting and the specific area the campaign is starting in. Also, the actions of the PCs do not occur in a vacuum. The PCs actions can affect the area around them, but more likely the area will affect them. Nations go to war, plagues break out, technological breakthroughs occur and new races are discovered, all of which will have some impact on the PCs.

Along with a handout describing the basics of the rules, a one or two page (at most) handout describing the game world (as best as the PCs would know) is very useful. Such a handout should be given to players before they create their character, since it will likely influence character concept and creation (for example, a player creating an elf before he finds out that in the game world elves are rare and considered demonic by other races).

Know Your Players

This is one of the things that many GMs fail to do when starting a campaign and has caused more campaigns to fail than anything else. There are two basic issues here: how the player intends to run his character, and the player himself.

First, the GM should find out how the player in general intends to run his character, and if there are any particular long and short term goals of the PC. Also, the player and GM should work out a reasonably detailed background for the character. The goals and background will shape the character's interactions with NPCs and other PCs, and are useful to the GM for creating plot threads and twists (the author uses these techniques quite often, and they work very well).

Second, you should know when each player will be able to show up and for how long. This makes planning gaming sessions much easier, since you and the other players will know who is a regular and who is a part-timer. The personality of the player is important as well; if the player is known to be an argumentative rules-lawyer type, or frequently betrays/backstabs other player characters, it might be best to avoid him. On the other hand, a player that has a reputation for being easy to get along with and rarely argues with the GM would be a plus to a group. It is also useful to find out what general types of adventures each player prefers (mystery, action, etc.). While the game system being used will to some degree dictate the nature of the adventure (you are unlikely to run a slapstick adventure in a Call of Cthulhu campaign, for example), there is usually enough room for variety.

From time to time, the GM should seek comments from the players about what they think of the way the campaign is going. While it usually isn't possible to please every player, you don't want a full scale desertion on your hands. It's better to prevent problems than to fix them.

Know Yourself

The final point, and perhaps the most important, is for the GM to consider what he wants to run, and how. This is similar to "Know Your Players" above, but are questions the GM must ask of himself.

How much time can you devote to being a Game Master? Will you need to rely on supplements and modules or do you have enough time to do most of the work yourself? What kinds of adventures do you prefer to run? How many players can you comfortably handle at once? Is there any ultimate goal(s) you would like the campaign to work towards?

Your overall goal should be to provide entertainment for yourself and as many players as possible. You need to understand that it's doubtful you can make all your players happy in each adventure, especially if you are GMing a large number. You don't want to overburden yourself with your campaign, and a small number of players is usually best to start with. You can add on to this as time goes by, or possibly separate the players into two or more different groups (like a spin-off series in television).

Above all, make sure that you enjoy the campaign. If you don't like it, your players probably won't either.

Liber Athenaeum

By Owen S. Kerr

Art by Brian Despain and colored by Phil Reed

It often requires more courage to read some books than it does to fight a battle.
-- Sutton Elbert Griggs (1872-1930)

The *Liber Athenaeum* (Latin for "book of libraries") is either a work of powerful magic or sufficiently advanced technology, depending upon the campaign world. Different groups and cultures refer to it as *The Last Book*, *The First Book*, and *The Final Reference*. The book is a repository of great knowledge, as it has the ability to recreate within its covers the text of any written material about which the user has heard. The volume responds to the spoken or unspoken wishes of the user, with near-telepathic precision. Whether the tome is psionic or simply a near-AI expert system, the *Athenaeum* never fails to surprise a first-time user with the breadth and scope of knowledge about the exact topic that is foremost on the subject's mind.

Warehouse 23: Liber Athenaeum

A discerning GM may not want to unleash the full *Athenaeum* in his game world, so feel free to limit the scope of the text. A book with full knowledge of business information, perhaps, or a text with clear and accurate information on personal relationships, would serve many of the same purposes as the full work, without unbalancing the game universe. These limited texts only have access to data which is immediately pertinent to the subject. (Your players may try to fast-talk you into giving more information than you feel that they should have. Make a detailed list of what types of information the book holds, and stick to it.)

The literature replicated in the *Athenaeum* always appears in a format that reflects the capabilities of the user, including intelligence, native language, and reading level. Use of the tome requires a few days of attunement, during which time the new user studies the existing text of the *Athenaeum*'s current topic. Attunement takes seven days, minus a number of days equal to the user's IQ divided by 40. (The village idiot, IQ 40, would take six days to find that he had a new picture-book, while a whiz kid, IQ 200, would have the *Athenaeum* figured out in two days.) Reading aloud from the book hastens the process, halving the attunement time.

After attuning to the book, a user simply has to hold the *Athenaeum* in his hands, and speak aloud the topic that he wishes to know more about. Without specific orders otherwise, the *Athenaeum* will simply reproduce an existing text which most closely mirrors the user's desires. The topic "cars," for example, will bring forth a simple overview of the auto industry, while "a repair manual for a '66 Ford Custom with a 352 big block" will be much more specific. The tome may also be commanded to synthesize a work based on multiple sources. A musical *Athenaeum*, for example, could be asked to produce "three concertos in the style of Mozart, based on all of his previous works, the development of his style during his life, and events of historical importance that would have influenced his work if he had lived to be fifty-five."

Any named book, treatise, article, play, or musical composition can be duplicated by the *Athenaeum*, including "lost" works, private publications, corporate records, grimoires, and electronic publications. General textbooks on any

subject can be coaxed into being, based solely on the wishes of the user. Owners of the book have created survival manuals, alchemy texts, encyclopedias of poisons, manuals of football strategy, engineering tables, ship-recognition texts, heraldic armorials and songbooks. Documented examples of the text have used English, Arabic, Greek, and Cyrillic alphabets, hieroglyphics, cuneiform, simple pictograms, and Braille, with most exhibiting full-color illustrations appropriate to the work.

There are also indications that the *Athenaeum* contains information far in advance of any contemporary work. Seekers of the book tracked its location to the private safe of a NASA scientist -- said scientist had, after decades of lackluster work, applied for the patents for the first practical ion engines. Notes in the safe also indicated that the scientist was composing an article for a scientific journal; the main thrust of the article seemed to be the ease with which an inexpensive and safe FTL drive could be developed, using existing technology. Stories that the learned gentleman also had several working prototypes of a desktop fusion generator are, as yet, unconfirmed.

The information contained in the *Athenaeum* is not limited to purely technical or pragmatic concepts. Rumors about a well-known pop group hint that the main songwriter kept a "personal journal" where he composed his songs, three of which catapulted to the top of the charts in record time. The catchiest tune, "Trainscripting," remained in the Top One Hundred for an unprecedented 121 weeks. After a meteoric rise to become the cutting-edge musical talent of the decade, the writer inexplicably took his own life soon after an unknown person or persons broke into the band's tour bus. The intruders ignored large amounts of money, drugs, and electronic equipment, instead making off with the journal; investigators were forced to conclude that the worst crime committed was unlawful entry. Friends and band-mates claimed that the songwriter became extremely despondent at the loss of his notebook, and killed himself two days after the robbery.

The *Athenaeum* always appears as a nondescript volume, blending in well with any other literature in the immediate area. It has taken the form of a large leather-bound tome, a medium-sized hardback, a leather file folder, a music portfolio, and, in at least one instance, a massive illuminated scroll. In any manifestation, the Athenaeum is always of the sturdiest construction, with no loose leaves (or equivalent). The book, through magical defenses or high-tech materials, is impervious to damage. Fire, electricity, cold, acid, microwave, gamma radiation, diamond-bit drills, cutting lasers, rock crushers, and a large axe have been utilized in various attempts to destroy the book, and all have failed.

The invulnerability of the work has been used to great advantage. The legends surrounding the Prophet Ghadi ibn'Tuek indicate that, before the Battle of Maydan-e Khan, the Prophet shunned armor and "wrapped himself in the Word of God" (*The Book of Dhay'ed*) to lead his followers into one of the bloodiest battlegrounds of the Ghorgaan Unification Wars. Though unhorsed and knocked down several times by the Khanate Immortals, ibn'Tuek "miraculously" escaped injury, and managed to defeat Caliph Bra'khal in single combat. The *Athenaeum*, revered as a holy relic, remained in the possession of ibn'Tuek's successors until its theft during the reign of the Ninth Prophet.

Some question the reasoning behind the multiple attempts to actively destroy this book, feeling that the wealth of knowledge that it represents is incalculable. Wiser heads realize that knowledge is power, and power in the wrong hands is a terrifying idea to many that have owned the *Athenaeum*. Religious leaders and zealots, when confronted with the power of this fabulous book, have either embraced it as a sign of God's grace and benevolence or reviled it as a work of the Adversary. Indeed, its inherent power could indicate either one.

Modern science suggests that the *Athenaeum* is an artifact of non-human origin, using room-temperature super-conduction, ultra-light polymers, memory plastics, neural-net processing with true holographic memory, and a sensor array that defies description. There is every indication that the book is actually a high-sentience artificial intelligence. If true, the *Athenaeum* could be best described as an immortal entity, capable of assuming any number of innocuous forms, with instant recall of millennia of human history, and able to communicate with any human being. The book has, at one time or another, been described as having a personality of sorts. Records are very sketchy, but paint a picture of a calm, self-assured, gentle entity, with a near-cosmic grasp of the failings of humanity. The *Athenaeum* seems to have no set agenda, preferring to act according to its user's wishes, then closely observing how the person chooses to deal with the information.

Adventure Seeds

These seeds assume the use of a "limited" text, as defined above. Strong caution: an unlimited *Liber Athenaeum* is a hugely unbalancing item in a typical campaign, and a great deal of thought should go into whether or not you will be able to remove it from the campaign should it become necessary, as well as how that end shall be achieved. An unwary GM may as well hand over all campaign materials to his players at the start of the session, as the judicious use of an omniscient artifact will have practically the same effect.

The Faustian Libram

This seed is suitable for any fantasy campaign, or any system incorporating supernatural special effects (ie. ***In Nomine***, ***Call of Cthulhu***, ***Shadowrun***, etc.) The party's reoccurring enemy, a powerful NPC, makes a bargain with a Lord of Darkness. In return for his undying loyalty and service, the Dread Lord promised dark knowledge. Listening to His minion's complaints about the party, the Dark One presented him with *The Book Of Enemies*. With this reference, the new servant of the Dark easily makes the player's lives miserable, as he seems intimately familiar with the contents of player spellbooks, scrolls, maps, and personal journals. The Bad Guy starts to act like he has some great advisors, no matter the situation at hand. He becomes, overnight, a master strategist, brilliant planner, Machiavellian plotter, and all-around pain in the neck. If the players a) manage to kill the Bad Guy, b) take the *Athenaeum*, and c) realize what they have (assuming there is any hint of the object in the legends or databases), they'll have their hands full keeping the book from its former owner. The Dread Lord will be quite exercised that some lowly mortals have offed his Chosen Representative. Be sure that He'll send some heavies to take care of the problem, one way or another.

Business As Usual, and Then Some

The *Athenaeum Reparo* ("library of business") is great for ***Shadowrun***, ***Cyberpunk***, or any other post-modern RPG. A major manufacturing company starts hitting the market with great products, always the Big New Thing, always in the right place at the right time, with near-prescient demographic information, pouring financial backing into all the small companies with cutting-edge pop-culture gizmos, games, and gadgets. New collectible card game? They always have *exactly* enough product to go around, and no warehouse overhead; they ship straight from the printers to the distributors, with exacting precision, and highly-profitable results. If the new hot thing is sub-dermal timepiece implants, GeneriTech had the patents last year, FDA and AMA approval last month, and surgeons standing by. The company never suffers setbacks from strikes, blockades, civil wars, fuel shortages, heat waves, global warming, or any other Modern Problems. They lead charmed lives, and have made some *powerful* enemies. Only the Board of Directors know that their position is due to their possession of *The Book of Modern Business*.

The mission, should the PCs choose to accept it, is to commit the ultimate in corporate espionage: a full burner search-and-destroy. The team has access to more and better support than they have ever imagined. Money is no object, as the home megacorp is liquidating all non-essential assets to deal with the threat. Netrunners, soldiers, pet sorcerers, second-story men, military and black-market hardware, software, wetware, netware, spellware, artifacts, relics, whatever. Let 'em take the kitchen sink, if they think it'll do any good. Their orders: get in, find out *how* they're doing it, steal the data if they can, destroy it if the guano hits the windmill. It's win-or-die time, slim, but no worries: any survivors get to split the bonus.

Make your players work for this one. GeneriTech knows what it has in the *Athenaeum*, and the Board of Directors will cut your crew's throats with steak knives from the cafeteria before giving it up. They have a lot money, a great deal of influence, and they have at least as much hardware as the party. For an additional level of difficulty, insinuate that the data they're looking for is in a small, potentially fragile container.

All's Fair In Love And War

In a seed featuring the *Athenaeum Affinitas* ("library of relationships"), a PC comes to the attention of a wealthy businessman/military genius/computer whiz. The VIP is instantly and obviously smitten, and spends a few moments

speaking with the PC, exchanging little more than names and handshakes. The next day, the love-interest finds himself the object of an exceptionally subtle seduction. The entire written history of the PC is literally an open book to the would-be lover. School records, vaccination records, hospital records, test scores, papers, mash notes, e-mail, subscription information, detailed credit card information; you name it. Access to anything relating directly to the PC is child's play for the intelligence of the Athenaeum. If the PC likes music, the lover is at the concert - in the adjacent seat. A coffee fan would see a familiar face at the Java Shack, and so on.

And what if the *Athenaeum* really likes its current owner? And wants him to be happy? The ultimate information source, linked to a godlike intelligence, with the benevolence and wisdom of a keen third-party observer of human nature, containing 20,000 years of accumulated data on the subject… and it wants the couple to be together.

Liber Athenaeum Cthulhu

This seed is based on a limited text with data concerning exact and specific summoning rituals. The *Athenaeum* presents the information in a format that is easy to follow, with a guide for those names and phrases that are hard to pronounce, like "Cthulhu fthagn," "Nyarlathotep," and/or some of the nastier demons from *In Nomine*.

The owner of a local bookstore has found an unremarkable hardback in a recent books-by-the-pound estate sale. It seems to be a reference text and how-to manual for the summoning of Creatures From Beyond The Veil. A staunch atheist, the bookseller stays amused by keeping up with the latest fashions in literary idiocy. He decided to read a few choice passages aloud (to the amusement of his wife) late one evening at home - how was he to know that the stars were right?

This version of events for the *Athenaeum* could be a *GURPS Black Ops* cover-up scenario, a *Call of Cthulhu* plot hook, or an *In Nomine* Marches campaign ("The Ethereals are coming! The Ethereals are coming!").

Holy Klono!

By Marcus L. Rowland

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Phil Reed

"..who is this Klono, by whom you were swearing a while ago?..."
"...a combination of Noshabkeing, some of the gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans, all three of the Fates, and quite a few other things as well... He's got so much stuff - teeth and horns, claws and whiskers, tail and everything - that he's much more satisfactory to swear by than any other space-god I know of."
-- Grey Lensman (chapter 2)

...These deities are completely dependent on their believers, their very natures sculpted by the fabric or substance of faith and thought... But although they depend upon their followers, their powers and existence are still quite real. A GM could make this the test for sentience - the ability to create and power a god!
-- GURPS Religion (pp 24)

Klono worship seems to be the nearest thing there is to a universal religion in the *Lensman* universe. He's the god spacemen and Lensmen swear by, not just on one world but throughout Civilization. Some even carry icons and statuettes of the god. He has rivals, of course; for example, Valerians feel that Noshabkeming is better, since his followers are more devout. But Noshabkeming's worship is confined to a few score worlds; Klono's name, and the practice of swearing by him, has spread through two galaxies.

Klono differs from previous gods in three important respects; sheer number of believers (here "believer" is defined as someone who has heard of Klono to the extent of swearing by him), the quality of their minds, and the fact that many are telepaths.

Civilization includes a (literally) astronomical number of member worlds: ...in the First Galaxy alone there are over one hundred thousand million suns ...each sun has, on the average, something over one and thirty-seven hundredths planets inhabited by intelligent life ...about one half of these planets then adhered to Civilization...?
-- Children of the Lens (Chp. 28)

The Real Old Time Religion

Traditional Filk (SF folk song) author of this verse unknown (Tune: "Old Time Religion")

(Chorus):
Give me that real old time religion
Give me that real old time religion
Give me that real old time religion
It's good enough for me!

How the hell can Klono manage
Not to do himself some damage?
But with all those weird appendage-
-es he's good enough for me!

(Chorus etc...)

It is implied that most of these worlds have populations at least as large as that of Earth. Many of these creatures will not initially have anything resembling religious concepts - for example, it has been suggested that in humans religion originates from the fact that children are dependent on their parents for the first years of their lives; humans are therefore disposed to believe in a higher power - but as their spacemen and Patrol officers mingle with off-worlders the idea will undoubtedly spread. Even if they don't take religion seriously it is likely that they will pick up the habit of swearing, and thus come to know of Klono. Spaceal, the spaceman's argot of Civilization can probably take a share of the blame: "...a language which, except for its highly technical aspects, is basically and completely profane, obscene, vulgar, lewd, coarse and foul." (*Masters of the Vortex* (Chp. 12))

To swear by Klono is to acknowledge the existence of the concept of Klono, and thus prepare the ground for belief in Klono. In the *Lensman* universe many of those who swear by Klono are Exalted (L29), far beyond their species norm in intelligence, physique, and psychic ability: at the end of the Boskone war Earth alone graduates roughly a hundred Lensmen a year, and most other worlds of Civilization do equally well. Moreover, they are simply the peak of a selection process in which even the rank and file of the Patrol are superior to most civilians. It should also be remembered that the Patrol isn't the only career that will lead Exalted humans and aliens into space; there are also the civilian space lines and thousands of multi-system commercial and academic organizations.

LET THE POWER OF KLONO INTO YOUR LIFE!

Since the dawn of Civilization thousands have owed their lives and fortunes to the intercession of KLONO. Wild Bill Williams was an unsuccessful asteroid miner, dogged by pirates and claim jumpers, until he bought a LUCKY KLONO STATUETTE; on his next mining trip he found a meteor worth FIFTEEN HUNDRED CREDITS, and went on to make a series of MASSIVE ORE FINDS. Vesta of Vegia was a lowly translator until she learned Spaceal and began to SWEAR BY KLONO; within weeks she WON 1,762,810 CREDITS and BROKE THE BANK of Club Elysian on Chickladore, and went on to become a PROMINENT VEGIAN BANKER. Kimball Kinnison is known to have SOUGHT KLONO'S INTERCESSION many times in his career; today he is GALACTIC COORDINATOR! Now YOU TOO can own a LUCKY KLONO STATUETTE, identical to those belonging to many FAMOUS PERSONALITIES AND CELEBRITIES! Send a check or money order (no cash or stamps please) for a mere Five Credits to LUCKY KLONO STATUETTE, 934 Strata Towers, Dublin, Tellus. Money back if your fortunes have not improved within 28 days of receipt of a LUCKY KLONO STATUETTE. Offer void where prohibited by law - handling charges may apply in the second galaxy - Mars residents add 1 cento sales tax

Something more is needed for true belief in Klono to take root; events which demonstrate Klono's power, or his intercession in the affairs of men. In this respect it need hardly be mentioned that no adherent of Civilization who mentions Klono throughout the Lensman series is killed; moreover, that many of them repeatedly survive seemingly inevitable destruction, often by means which anyone other than Mentor might classify as sheer luck or a miracle.

Lensman Masters abandoned his ruined DeLameter and looked for a way out of the warehouse. Behind him a concrete wall, in front four thought-screened zwilniks were blasting away the last of the crates that sheltered him, overhead their ship jammed the ether and thought bands for parsecs around. No way to get help, no escape route. "Great Klono! How do I get out of this one?" he gasped, ducking for cover as another crate exploded... and one of the obsolete blasters inside landed at his feet. No power pack - but there was an old-fashioned mains socket only feet away, and he could see some recharging leads in the smouldering crate. He threw another blaster to one side, the zwilniks firing towards the noise it made as it landed, rolled and grabbed some leads, ducked back behind the crates and lunged for the socket, saw the "recharge" light come on, and started blasting.

Four seconds later it was over, the last of the zwilniks dead. "Klono's golden gills!" he panted, binding his most serious burns and salvaging uniforms and more useful weapons from the bodies. With telepathy and the ether screened they had to be relying on visual communication. One of the zwilniks looked a little like him, with luck he could fool their ship into landing. . .

While the precisionist minds of Second Stage Lensmen consciously reject the possibility of intervention by Klono, some small fragment of the subconscious may retain the impression that the god has helped. Ordinary Lensmen, with less focused will, are much more likely to retain such impressions. Normally this tiny trace of credulity would have little or no effect, but the mind of a Lensman is so powerful that it must surely have some measurable effect upon the universe. It may be tiny, but it's there.

The third factor in Klono's favor is telepathy. Lensmen routinely exchange thoughts telepathically, with many subtle contextual overtones accompanying the main message. There are many incidents of more intense two-way connections, usually as part of a developing romantic relationship. All help to spread knowledge of Klono across planetary and species boundaries. More importantly, telepathy is undoubtedly responsible for circumstances in which

hundreds or millions of powerful minds may simultaneously think of the god. During the Boskone war Kimball Kinnison found it necessary to link to thousands of other Lensmen on several occasions; more than a million Lensmen participated in his wedding ceremony by this means. The final battle against the Spawn of Boskone was largely won by the massed minds of all of the Lensmen of Civilization, directed by a fusion of the Kinnison family. Even the tiniest possible iota of that immense mental power must surely suffice to finally create the god, if it is possible at all.

It's notable that the destruction of the Spawn of Boskone also marks the moment at which Mentor and the other Arisians withdraw from the Galactic stage, claiming that their pupils will now be able to excel them. Could this mean that Civilization has now passed its final test, and created its own deity?

Holy Klono!

QX... So... He's A God...

"Let's go through this again. What you're telling me is that as you prepared to take out the zwilnik base's force field generator it was spontaneously overloaded by a freak ether storm. You used the distraction to get past the outer defenses and into the command bunker, where you found the zwilniks shooting at shadows and each other. By the time you'd mopped up and secured the base there were three zwilnik survivors, two of whom are still in comas and the third apparently a raving lunatic who keeps babbling about tentacles with claws. QX so far?"

"QX. Oh, and we found some hoof prints in the dormitories; didn't match any of the species in the base, and the chest of the Jovian we think was running the base was crushed, with a hoof mark that matched the tracks."

"Hmm... Get your reports out to Kinnison, and another forensic crew into that base. There's obviously something we're missing..."

If Klono exists, how does he shape up as a god? His origin suggests many of the answers; irrespective of his original worshippers on Corvina II, this manifestation has been created mainly by the beliefs of spacemen, so it's likely that space will be his main sphere of influence. As originally described he seems to be an all-purpose god, but in his popular usage he functions primarily as destructive Fate. If something doesn't work Klono has disabled it; if someone or something is to be condemned, Klono is asked to take it. He is always described as an animalistic God, and his attributes are inexorably linked to his physical form. This is the aspect that is most likely to remain unchanged. He is a huge beast, with an unspecified number of limbs, claws, and other appendages, most of which seem to be made of metal. A case could be made for associating these attributes with all or any of the traditional godlike spheres of influence. For example, his bull-like features might lead to an association with storms; since he is primarily a God of space they would most likely be Ether storms. With a broader base of worshippers he might be a less specific force present in the hurricane, the nova, the runaway atomic vortex.

Once Klono exists he is likely to realize that almost all his worshippers are from Civilization, with a sizeable proportion members of the Patrol. If Klono wants more intense worship it's them he'll have to impress. Helping the Patrol in its fight against zwilniks and other enemies is an obvious possibility, and fits in nicely with his role as a god of fate and destruction; if you take on the Patrol you're probably fated for destruction...

It should be apparent that Klono has a vested interest in the continuation of warfare, piracy, crime and other disruptions; with peace the Patrol might be run down, and there would be fewer opportunities for his invocation. They would still exist - everyone swears occasionally - but there would probably be less emotional intensity behind it. Nevertheless Civilization is his obvious ally provided the Patrol does not attempt to limit his power.

The Spawn of Boskone and other enemies of Civilization should be Klono's enemies, but in practice they are authoritarian organizations which might find it easier to cope with the idea of an active deity. Where Lensmen might try to control Klono, their enemies might think of appeasing him and trying to gain his favor; perhaps by adopting his worship as a state religion, or sacrificing innocent lives to ether storms; they may even think of sacrificing entire planets. In the God business old alliances may sometimes take second place to someone who can provide a captive audience of several billion worshippers, or several billion sacrificial victims. It would be ironic if Klono was created by Civilization but became yet another enemy...

"Looks like he's taking the bait..." Lensed Kit Kinnison, as the ether storm closed around Goodman 12C. "I'd give it another forty seconds before he realizes that there's nothing down there but millions of psionic broadcasters, by then he ought to be fully materialized. Negaspheres, stand by, stand by, on my mark ten... nine... eight..."

One final possibility: even if the massed minds of the Patrol cannot create Klono, it's entirely possible that someone could fake his existence. The Patrol has all the technology needed, so do many of their enemies. Why anyone should want to do so is a good question; finding the answer could make an excellent adventure.

* * *

Special thanks to Dave Langford, Roger Robinson and Gharlane of Eddore for help tracking down references to Klono.

Pyramid Review

Scimitar

Published by L&C Games

Scimitar is a new fantasy roleplaying game from L&C Games of Scotland. Produced only on CD-ROM, it is published in Adobe's PDF file format making it accessible to most people with a PC. Acrobat Reader is required to read these files, but this program comes on the CD-ROM. Since L&C aims at keeping overheads and publishing costs down, further supplements will be in PDF format as well. If purchased together, all the supplements and rules are placed on one CD. *Scimitar* retails for £6 ($11 approximately) plus shipping. Supplements have been priced at £3.50 ($6 approximately). An intro pack is available with the Core Rules and any 2 sourcebooks of your choice on 1 CD for £11 (about $19).

The Setting

Scimitar is set in a small fantasy continent called Thayathorn. The world has a vast mixture of races and cultures ranging from the Silash, an elven-like race of primitive tribes, to the Kingdom of Trunia, a pseudo-Victorian kingdom with some technology meshed with a scientific use of magic. What was refreshing about *Scimitar* as I first read through it was the tone of originality placed on the races. Although many may well seem familiar, the designer has added fresh ideas to them. For instance, the Silash, although elven-like, are as faraway from Tolkiens High Elves as you will ever find. Primitive savages, their method of gaining greater magic is to mutilate their bodies and sacrifice body parts. Their view of the world is not altruistic, but savage and uncompromising. The Randeshi (a race of small shape-changing humans) are not underground dwellers, but a broken race of wanderers who one held the secret of technology.

The cultures are quite wide in variety, from the west coast with a mixture of Roman and Grecian inspired city states, to the south with its large oriental empire called Greater Kell. On the east coast lie the "European" states of Trunia and the City States, and in Central Thayathorn lie the Silash Kingdoms and a smattering of backward Celtic-like cultures. To the north lie the tundra wastes occupied by tribes and the former Randeshi homelands. All this in one continent allows for almost any type of campaign, yet isn't too expansive a setting.

The one complaint I have with this is a lack of more in-depth information on the kingdoms. Although these will be dealt with in future supplements, I feel the core rulebook could have had more information. Racial and country information is separated in two areas, and *Scimitar*'s layout and production makes finding the relevant information a bit harder. An index could have been useful, and perhaps a chapter numbering system as used in *Harnmaster* products (Columbia games). Since the rulebook is on CD-ROM, a few more pages could have been added at little cost.

Scimitar tries to emphasize the fact that it is aimed at roleplaying, and after playing a few games I found the races do open up possibilities. The Silash barbarism mixed with the Victorian/feudal values of the Trunians seems to work well. All the races seem to have their own mystique and nature. Getting to grips with Randeshi refugees as they try to settle into a new way of life poses challenges. The mixture of technology (muskets, trains and ironclads) with the frequent use of magic is unfamiliar at first and takes a bit of getting used to. In one game I was faced with attacking a Adept Mage of Trunia expecting to be attacked by spells and spirits. Instead he drew a pistol and shot me!

The System

Scimitar uses the most common dice available: the d6. The dicing conventions are new, but easily mastered after a few games. The game uses the "roll against target number" approach which in this game works.

To determine a skill roll, you roll two six-sided dice. Either you may add the level of your skill, or the GM will give

you a number to add or subtract from this. This number, however, is added to both dice. The player rerolls all sixes and again adds his skill to each dice. He may keep rerolling sixes indefinitely, though after six sixes the matter is academic as he will achieve any required target number.

Characters are made up 12 attributes: 4 primary and 8 secondary; the primary rolls having a direct effect on the secondary scores. Each attribute generates a dice modifier used for skill rolls and attribute checks. The skill system is defined by characters choosing skill clusters (groups of skills directly rated to their occupation or social standing). Five skill clusters are chosen in matter of priority, and depending on the priority skills are cheaper to buy and expand in different clusters. The more important the cluster, the cheaper it is to gain experience in later games.

Skill points are defined by the characters, and these are spent on chosen skills. A character who is 18 years old and playing a normal campaign would receive three times his age, or 54 skill points, to spend in initial generation. The amount given can be changed if you wish to play more heroic campaigns, up to a maximum of five times the PC's age.

Career templates are available to help the initial player choose the right skill clusters. I liked this idea of almost-complete freedom to build your own character combined with the option of careers to steer the PC in the right direction. The rules provide templates for all the races and generalized ones as well.

The combat system is fairly easy to get to grips with, but PCs have the option of using "swing points" to influence attacks, speed of attack, damage or defense. The swing point system was a little hard to get used to, and a few combat examples would have been suitable. Fans of hit locations and descriptive wounds will like the system. Although initial damage is a number, it is given a description such as critical or moderate wound; with a creative GM this greatly enhances the feeling of "being there" and "being hit." There are more than enough weapons given, and the cultural weapons of each race are described. Some interesting ideas are presented, such as the Randeshi Axe-Battle Ka, which is weighted inside the haft to provide extra punch to the swing, or the witch wood weapons of the Silash, which poison on contact and can be pushed into the earth and regrown overnight if broken. Guns are also prevalent, with matchlocks and flintlocks. Just don't try and reload in front of a charging Norker (as I found out to my detriment).

Magic is in the forms of Hermetic (spells, sorcery), Devotional (religious), Runic (symbols and engravings) and Spiritual (shamanism) and others. I like the magic in this game. It isn't all powerful and has a naturalistic feel to it, but there's not enough! Spell descriptions are in the game, but I would have wanted more. Depending on what career you take, the power of magic can be limited. I believe the Talents section is unique I think; the designer seems to have taken the Cantrip spell in *AD&D* and expanded it. If PC's have a high magical attribute (Aura) they can inherit natural Talents. None of these are powerful, but they are useful. For example, the ability of Drewifus allows the user to momentarily remove all feelings of pain. The pain will return again quickly (within 1 or 2 minutes), but in that time the user may perform tasks unable to perform under pain. There are 36 in total and I wish the rest of the magic contained as much.

Overall, the system lends itself to limited dice rolling except in combat, and this only for wound resolution and location. Skill rolls are only needed in "stressful or difficult situations."

A more streamlined layout would help things immensely but perhaps this will be fixed in future editions.

Conclusion

The biggest limitation of *Scimitar* seems to be related to its format; it's only available on CD-ROM for Windows 95/98/3.1, with no hard copy available. Although *Scimitar* has a slightly confusing layout and lacks an index, it is at least helped by the search facility on Adobe Acrobat. The simple system has enough scope to add more. Although I would have preferred more magic, I liked the original but familiar-feeling background. And, given the reasonable cost of the main rules and supplements, it's cheap to buy and expand.

-- Richard Talbot

Pyramid Review

Aberrant: XWF, by Rob Hatch

Expose: Aberrants, by Greg Stolze

24 pages each, $4.95 each

The latest sorcebook for *Aberrant*, *XWF* (short for Xtreme Warfare Federation) is a mini sourcebook (24 pages) detailing professional wrestling in the world of *Aberrant*. Now, if you don't like professional wrestling, I've got two... I mean, this likely won't interest you, even if you like *Aberrant*.

Me, I've always liked it (even in the dark years, when I wasn't watching any). The ideas in it make me tingle, even if the matches are fixed, the characters tend to verge on a number of rather nasty -isms, and the constant face/heel (good guy/bad guy) switches verge on the ridiculous.

Heck, I've even used this idea before, creating a *Champions* character who was a wrestler. Of course, that was a lot more four color than *XWF* is.

XWF does a good job translating professional wrestling into the world of *Aberrant*. It doesn't make it a central part of the world, but does make it interesting. There's also a fair bit of stuff on starting an XWF campaign. The federation is divided up into various "circles" which is there to keep wrestlers alive (not all novas are created equally), and statistics are given for the champs and number one contenders of each division.

It wraps up with a couple new combat maneuvers (wanna slap a piledriver on some jabroni? Go right ahead!). What it's missing is a few pages on constructing nova wrestlers & their characters (what backgrounds do you think you have to buy to have a good catchphrase on the lips of millions? It Doesn't Matter What You. . . Never mind).

XWF is a good sourcebook; I've finished it with more neat campaign ideas rumbling through my head than some sourcebooks three time its size (and cost). It's the best example of the utility of the mini-sourcebook I've seen to date.

Expose: Aberrants doesn't feel as successful as *XWF*. It comes across as a sourcebook that's too small, rather than a small sourcebook.

Expose: Aberrants outlines the Aberrants, one of the Nova factions of Aberrant. These are Aberrants who are struggling against the giant Project Utopia, while not whole-heartedly rejecting their humanity like the Terragen.

One of the primary plot threads addressed by *Expose: Aberrants* is the murder of Slider, a member of Team Tomorrow whose death was one of the central metaplots in the main *Aberrant* book (one which, pretty much anyone will tell you, was tantalizing in its lack of actual useful detail).

Expose: Aberrants details the Aberrants faction, but not as enchantingly as *XWF* does its subject. The general setup of the faction and its goals are detailed, and they're interesting. What's unfortunate is that the book is a bit off track.

It's easy to imagine *Expose: Aberrants* being split up into two mini-books: One would detail the murder of Slider, giving enough detail for mystery hungry players and vengeful Novites alike to roar off into the night to Dispense Justice, and another to cover the nascent Aberrant faction.

As it is, the book does a good job of filling in gaps as to Slider's murder (but, oddly enough, doesn't actually tell the GM who did it, or offer more than a list of suspects) and seems to skim over the Aberrant organization in any detail.

The layout is also somewhat inefficient, with white space that could have been filled with informational goodness.

One other problem (a personal quibble) is Guy Davis furnishes all the art in this book. I have no problem with Mr. Davis, or his art. He's a fine artist, and I really enjoy his work on **Wraith** and in some **Kindred of the East** books. I don't know if I want to spend 24 pages looking at it.

XWF, in the end, is much more successful in using the mini-book medium than **Expose**, which would have benefited from a larger format.

-- *Justin Mohareb*

Pyramid Pick

Raining Hammers

Published by [Knuckleduster Publications](#)

Written by Forrest Harris

144 pages (8-1/2" x 11"), $17.95

Don't get shot.

That's the big lesson I've learned from *Raining Hammers*, the Interactive Western Adventure from Knuckleduster.

Raining Hammers is a western adventure set in the New Mexico of 1883. It tells the tale of Johnny MacDonald, a prospector who is framed for the murder of his two brothers. It is intended for one player, using keyed paragraphs, like the old *Fighting Fantasy* or *Choose Your Own Adventure* books:

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> The shadows deepened as Johnny reached the end of the hall, passing first a closed door, then two open rooms. The last door was closed as well, a shaft of daylight peeking out from under it, split by a shadow that danced to and fro in time to the unmistakable creak of a rocking chair.
>
> *To kick in the door to the last room, go to 32.*
> *To knock on the door, go to 105.*
> *To search front-to-back instead, go to 215.*

In all, the book has 400 numbered passages, which is more than enough to tell a good-sized story. A sample encounter is included on their website, for those looking for something a bit more interactive.

The game simulates traditional pen-and-paper RPGs with dice rolling (using six-sided dice), inventory, and other role-playing trappings. *Raining Hammers*'s RPG elements can be enjoyed transparently, simply rolling the dice and doing what it tells you ("Roll 3 dice. If you roll 16 or more, go to 280. If you roll less than 16, go to 269."), or more actively, by creating your own character with eight attributes (called aptitudes) and seven skills, then using their modifiers (in the example above, you roll against your Luck at a -3 penalty). *Raining Hammers* offers suggestions for making the adventure easier or harder, and some general guidelines for converting it to use with other systems. (As an aside, it would be trivial to convert this adventure to *GURPS*.) It even includes information for readers who may want to turn the game into a group adventure.

The system is surprisingly fun; you start with two "bonus rolls," which are extra dice you can add to situations you feel are critical. Once you use a bonus roll, however, it's gone for good. You get more bonus rolls by doing impressive things (killing a noted desperado, for example), and upon completing the adventure. You can also lose bonus rolls by doing unheroic, careless, or just plain dumb things. Like getting shot, which will usually cost you half your bonus rolls if you're lucky, and kill you if you're not.

Any kind of solitaire adventure like this succeeds or fails based on the quality of the writing. Fortunately, *Raining Hammers*'s prose is excellent. I dislike western fiction, yet was drawn into this book from almost the beginning. It's

evocative, rich, and sets its scenes with a vividness I wish I could do consistently with my own GMing. Historical asides and "footnotes" are included in italics, which helps inform the reader of interesting facts while not distracting from the narrative flow. The book is intended for adults; while there's nothing particularly graphic, there are adult situations that Johnny finds himself in. Curse words, although present, have key letters hyphened out; while it's somewhat distracting, it also feels less gratuitous.

The plot is strong enough, despite being somewhat predictable; I was always more than eager to chase new threads in the story. The artwork is probably *Raining Hammers*'s weakest point; at its best the art is complementary to the story, and at its worst it's distracting. Please do not judge this book by its cover. Fortunately, the art is sparse, leaving more room for text.

Are there any problems with *Raining Hammers*? Unfortunately, yes. There seem to be a lot of times where the adventure will simply end because you failed a dice roll. Fail a Luck roll? You might get buried in rubble. Fail a Quick Draw roll? You might get shot in the back. While you will often know which rolls are more crucial, giving you an option to use bonus rolls, even rolling five dice won't necessarily save you if you need to roll a 15 to live. And there are often long stretches of the story where there aren't any decisions other than dice-rolling; make a roll to shoot the henchman, make a roll to find a horse, make a roll to ride away. Even worse, if you're really lucky (and use a lot of bonus dice) in certain parts of the adventure, you can miss substantial parts of *Raining Hammers*'s interesting bits.

This leads to an odd dynamic in the story; one the one hand, if you roll too well, you might miss a lot of the fun. If you roll too poorly, you might die. The parts of the story where you get to make decisions are the most interesting, and best simulate the role-playing I'm used to. But this is a fairly minor complaint; the rolls they really want you to fail are made difficult on purpose, and if you ever feel you died unjustly you could always cheat and pretend like you made that crucial roll. Finally, there are enough little typos (mostly punctuation problems) that will bother you if you're sensitive to that sort of thing.

In [last week's column](), Micah Jackson cited Wizards of the Coast's finding that a major reason people leave the role-playing hobby is a lack of people to game with. I tend to believe that, and hope books like *Raining Hammers* can fill some of this void. It's definitely one of the better solo adventures I've seen in a while, and is recommended for anyone who wants to live a well-written, well-researched piece of interactive western fiction.

-- Steven Marsh

Frankenstein Family Album

"Just like Mary Shelley
Just like Frankenstein
Clank your chains and count your change
Try to walk the line."
-- The Grateful Dead, "Ramble On Rose"

There's the Grateful Dead, and then there's the just plain ungrateful dead. Animate them out of sewn-together cadaver parts and they kill your bride and demand you help them spawn, then drag you into the icy north and literary immortality. It was immortality of a different sort that animated, if not the man behind the myth, at least the man behind the name, the name of Frankenstein at least. Which name, of course, he never had. But then, neither did the Monster, and that didn't stop the myth. We'll clank the chains of coincidence and implication that bind a forgotten alchemist to an immortal philosopher, and count some of the changes we can ring on fiction and truth alike. Because, like life and death, they're very distinct entities. If you don't believe me, ask Frankenstein.

"Georg von Frankenstein ... dismounted and attacked the foe. The dragon, defending his life, panted and spewed forth fire and smoke; the castle and the valley resounded with the clang of the sword. Finally, the knight triumphed. Scarcely feeling though the dragon was, it happened that he wound the tip of his tail with the poisonous spike around the knight's leg and wounded him ..."
-- August Nodnagel, *Hessenspiegel*

And you can start (as does Radu Florescu's *In Search of Frankenstein*) in 948 A.D., when the first known scion of that mighty house, one Arbogast von Frankenstein, won a tournament at Cologne. His connection with the Lützelbachs of Odenwald, and their heirs the Breubergs, is murky at best, but it was they who built in 1252, on a hill near Darmstadt in the Rhine valley, Castle Frankenstein. This "stone of the Franks" isn't a patch on grander piles, but maintains a nice air of wuthering gloom even now. From that date, then, the Lützelbach-Breubergs became (one imagines with some relief) the noble family von Frankenstein. One Frankenstein served with the Teutonic Knights (which, were we so inclined, could lead us into the icy mists of Thule and its black, sorcerous Society -- but not yet), and another entire branch settled in Transylvania (!) as part of the same German *Drang nach Osten.* It was the Transylvanian line that became (eventually) the Barons von Frankenstein (Baron Frank von Frankenstein (1647-1693), student of the Hollow Earth and alchemy, being the first such), rather than the Rhineland branch. One Rhenish Frankenstein did pass through Transylvania on pilgrimage in 1431 -- the year of Dracula's birth.

Exactly a century later, Sir Georg von Frankenstein died, according to his grave monument, after slaying a dragon ("dracul" in Romanian) near the castle. Sir Georg's death was only one of six violent or accidental deaths in the main Frankenstein lineage in a thirty-year period: his aunt and mother in 1525, his two brothers in 1525 and 1566, and his sister-in-law in 1553. (His father died, apparently naturally, at the age of 47 the year after Georg did.) This period, "the great Frankenstein death" in the records, found its coda in 1602 when Georg's last living descendant, his great-grandson Philip Ludwig von Frankenstein, died in an accident near the castle.

"Under the guidance of my new preceptors I entered with the greatest diligence into the search of the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life; but the latter soon obtained my undivided attention."
-- Victor Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Unsurprisingly, then, the family sold the castle to their feudal overlord, the Landgrave of Hesse, and decamped. By 1673, Castle Frankenstein had become a military hospital, which is where (and when) Johann Konrad Dippel was born. Son of a Lutheran minister, the young Dippel early considered himself, in his own words, animated by a "higher spirit" (a Frankenstein ghost?) which endowed him with nigh-supernatural intellect and prophetic gifts. Despite this early unorthodoxy, Dippel took a degree in theology at the University of Giessen, although because of it, he went to teach at the University of Strasbourg, old stomping ground of the alchemist Paracelsus (who also created an artificial man, and who visited Transylvania around the time of the "great Frankenstein death."). It was during his university days that Dippel began signing himself "Franckensteina," or Frankenstein.

While in Strasbourg, Dippel engaged in astrology and chiromancy, but was forced to flee city justice by night in 1696 -- perhaps due to an unfortunate habit of grave-robbing for medical lectures (or for other reasons, hmmm?). Returning to Darmstadt, he began studying alchemy, as Landgrave Ernst Ludwig of Hesse was well-known for his generous sponsorship of such studies. Sure enough, by 1701 he had created the Philosopher's Stone, and bought a large farm near the Castle (itself still too expensive). However, as the alchemical gold never managed to reach the Landgrave, Dippel moved on. In Berlin, under the wing of Chancellor Count August von Wittgenstein, he developed an Elixir of Life made from distilled blood. (He also invented an actually useful anti-spasmodic, Dippel's oil, made from boiled human bones.) And what do we call someone who unnaturally prolongs their life by drinking blood? That's right -- Dippel, the erstwhile Frankenstein, was a vampire. Be that as it may, in 1707 his strong resemblance to King Charles XII of Sweden got him tossed in jail as a Swedish spy; released through Wittgenstein's political influence, he moved to Holland. It was tough to get expelled from Holland, but Dippel managed it in 1714 (possibly, again, thanks to his habit of monkeying around with corpses, this time attempting to transfer souls from body to body). In Denmark, he was thrown in prison for treason, freed only when the hypochondriac Queen of Denmark made him her personal physician in 1726. No fool, Dippel quickly decamped to Sweden as personal physician to King Frederick I, but his Rasputin-like reputation drove him back to Darmstadt in 1729.

"The most humble undersigned asks of His Princely Highness to permit him to receive and to buy ... the castle Frankenstein ... For this he promises to cede to His Princely Highness an arcanum chymicum *which easily ... should yield at least as much revenue, all expenses deducted, as the total sum would be if the property were sold ..."*
-- Johann Konrad Dippel, letter to the Landgrave Ernst of Hesse (1732)

Here, he flung himself back into alchemical research, further refining his gruesome Elixir Vitae. He attempted to exchange its secret for the feudal right to Castle Frankenstein, but the Landgrave of Hesse, perhaps recalling that missing alchemical gold, rejected the offer. Dippel then printed up a circular advertising his Elixir, which got the attention of his old Prussian ally Count von Wittgenstein. Dippel promised that his Elixir would prolong life to the age of 135; unfortunately for him, he died in 1734. Quite possibly, he had misjudged the dosage: his body, found in Wittgenstein's palace, was stiff and cold, with foam at the mouth and a bluish tinge to one side of the face. Interesting coincidence watch: Dippel isolated potassium ferrocyanide, a key ingredient in Prussic acid. (By which method John Polidori, author of *The Vampyre,* committed suicide in 1821.) Cyanides, of course, leave a bluish tinge to the skin. Or, perhaps, so does transmigrating your soul into another body.

The Castle briefly fell under the sway of a mad baroness Euler, who sold off all the glass and furnishings to keep a court of lovers and, without windows, allowed birds and bats of all sorts to nest throughout the edifice. In 1763, a forester named Paul Meister, having discerned the location of a buried treasure in a "magic bottle," excavated "terrible caves and great caverns" under Castle Frankenstein until a workman named Drott died in a cave-in. Two more attempts, in 1770-71 and 1787, found only underground walls; finally a gunpowder explosion killed a last gold-seeker in 1788 and the authorities put a stop to the whole business. Castle Frankenstein became a picturesque ruin, attracting such visitors as Goethe and Bismarck.

"'My reign is not yet over' -- these words were legible in one of these inscriptions -- 'you live, and my power is complete. Follow me; I seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of cold and frost, to which I am impassive.'"
-- The Monster to Frankenstein, in *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

And, quite likely, Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, during her trip down the Rhine to Switzerland in 1814. Although she later claimed that the entire action of the novel *Frankenstein* came to her in a dream in 1816, she was in truth a highly intelligent woman who researched subjects such as galvanism, Swiss mountaineering, and alchemy for her novel. (Interestingly, though, much of the crucial summer of 1816 is missing from both Mary's journal and her cousin Claire Clairmont's, her companion both on the Rhine in 1814 and at the creation of *Frankenstein* two years later.) Although her hero, Victor Frankenstein, is a Swiss "natural philosopher," the parallels with Dippel's career are striking, from their mutual obsession with artificial and extended life, to alchemical studies. (Victor Frankenstein also attended the University of Ingolstadt, possibly at the same time as Adam Weishaupt, founder of the Bavarian Illuminati, did. Quite an alumni party those two could get up.) At the novel's end, Frankenstein, like Dippel, winds up in the arctic North

(not coincidentally, at the same time that Schlegel's anthropological mysticism was placing the origins of the white race in the polar reaches). He pursues his Monster onto the ice of Thule, entry to the Hollow Earth, home of the malevolent beings Hitler sought. Perhaps the same immaterial beings whose "higher spirit" sent an alchemist (and many others) on a fruitless search for the source of Life from graveyard to palace -- while it lay beneath the bat-infested walls of dragon-cursed Castle Frankenstein.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

I See You Shiver With Antici. . .

I really like Thin Mints.

First, let me offer a briefer for those of you who are not in the United States, who have been cryogenically frozen since 1912, or who otherwise don't know what Thin Mints are. Thin Mints are a type of Girl Scout Cookie. Girl Scout Cookies are the primary fundraisers of the Girl Scouts, an organization for girls ages 5 through 17 that I'm sure is wonderful, enriching and fulfilling. More importantly (to me), they sell Girl Scout Cookies.

(I *swear* I'm going to talk about gaming in this article. Honest.)

Girl Scout Cookies are very popular, for several reasons:

1. They are very tasty.
2. They support a worthwhile cause. . . namely those doe-eyed Girl Scouts who often look like they're going to cry if you don't buy a fifth box of Tagalongs.
3. They are only available for a few months a year.

This last idea is the one I want to focus on. If Thin Mints were available all the time, then I probably wouldn't like them anywhere near as much. There are lots of good cookies in the Cookie aisle of my local grocery store, many of which I love. Soft Batch Chocolate Chip Keeblers, for example. But I don't buy those as often as I do Girl Scout Cookies, paradoxically because I can get Soft Batch any time I want. But since Girl Scout Cookies are rarer, whenever the Girl Scouts knock on my door, with boxes of cookies in tow, I tend to buy them (the boxes, that is). And every year, right around this time, I anticipate them.

Which brings us to. . . anticipation.

Anticipation is very important to the gaming world. It's what makes us anxious for the Next Big Thing the companies are going to produce. It's knowing that a game is building towards something interesting.

It's what keeps us buying stuff every month.

Anticipation can be a very difficult balancing act for a company to achieve. On the one hand, you want your game to appear dynamic so long-time fans keep buying your products. On the other hand, you don't want your game to appear inaccessible for new players.

White Wolf's *Vampire: The Masquerade* is a game that has struck this balance well. *Vampire Third Edition*, for example, was a valuable resource for new players, while still offering a fair bit of new information for long-time players. White Wolf attempts to build anticipation in their lines by developing storylines that, while separate, are part of a larger whole. During the *Year of the Reckoning* the buzz about which clan would fall was incredible.

Magic: The Gathering builds anticipation in veterans with preview articles and prerelease contests and tournaments, while keeping the game accessible to new players with rules designed to keep the game approachable.

Anticipation is important. I remember reading the first edition *Deadlands* game back in 1996. There, in the main book, was a tantalizing sidebar: "The world of *Deadlands* is leading up to something even bigger and badder. Something drastic will happen in August 1998 -- something you won't believe. Stick with us until then, and you'll see it coming. You won't be disappointed." (*Deadlands*, p. 177) That something was *Hell on Earth*, and whether or not it lived up to my expectations, the point is that it was one heck of a teaser, and I loved it.

The moment I saw that the first *In Nomine* book after the obvious Corporeal / Ethereal / Celestial cycle was named *Fall of the Malakim* (a title that was kept secret for quite a while), I couldn't wait.

Anticipation.

I'm waiting for the next sign of Apocalypse.
I'm waiting for the link between Valefor and Janus to be revealed.
I'm waiting for the Vao.
I'm waiting for *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*.

I'm eating Girl Scout Cookies.

If the *Vampire: Gehenna* sourcebook were released tomorrow, it would almost certainly be a let down; I know this. There's no way a 144-page sourcebook could compare to the hours of gaming, the decade of waiting, the millennia of vampiric plots I've endured. But I love waiting. . . as long as I believe the waiting is worthwhile.

Which brings me, ultimately, to the *Torg* story.

My second week with you all, I hinted about the *Torg* story. . . a story from my GMing past so awful, I would share it with you as an example of my worst GMing moment, to help ensure no one else made the same mistake.

The more savvy of you realize I'm not revealing it this week.

I'm specifically *not* telling the *Torg* story to make a point. First, consider the hundred or so folks who've subscribed to the magazine since that column first ran. I want them to feel welcome. I want my column to feel accessible to them. But I also want my column to feel like it's part of a larger whole; I like to give enough of a road map to where we're going so that you can enjoy the scenery.

Here then, to keep you interested, is another one of Steven's Biggest Mistakes as GM.

My first campaign was a *GURPS Supers* campaign, which was a lot of fun despite my lack of experience with the rules. It was pretty four-color, modeled after more epic storytelling ventures like the Claremont *X-Men* and the like. So, with the campaign well under way, I wanted to recreate a staple of comics: The huge storyline.

Now, I didn't create this by stringing several adventures together; no, I decided it would be more fun to run this mega-adventure all at once, in one huge ten-hour session. We started in the morning, ate breakfast, and gamed. And gamed. And ordered pizza. And gamed. And gamed. And broke for dinner. And gamed. And gamed. We ran past the ten hours I'd anticipated. Plots moved along, various threads split and recombined, and the story unwound layer by layer like some Byzantine onion.

Finally, I had the Climactic Moment. Yes, it was revealed that the entire plot had been driven by. . . the Trusted Team Supervisor! Bwah-hah-hah!

Players: "Okay; we take him down."

Me: "Um. . . don't you want to hear his motivations? His justifications? His grand scheme?"

Players: "Not really. Maybe after we've stopped him. Maybe tomorrow. Right now, we just want to go to bed."

The PCs, of course, defeat the Good Guy Turned Bad Guy and saved the world. And they were too tired to care.

I'm convinced if I'd stretched the story out over four or five sessions, it would have been much more satisfying to my poor players. But instead I took what could have been five good sessions and turned them into one huge mediocre session.

"Wow," I hope at least some of you are thinking. "If that's one of the teaser stories, now I'm really curious about the *Torg* story." I hope I've made you anticipate my little tale, whenever it appears. And I hope we've given you other things to anticipate, like the April Fool's Issue we have coming up at the end of the month. Like our monthly columnists. Like our weekly features.

It's all about anticipation.

Companies: If you're offering a story-based world, make us trust your vision of the game. Give us short-term mysteries that keep us interested and long-term plots that, while unending like Xeno's Bridge, at least let us have fun while on the journey. Make us eager to buy the next book in your storyline, rather than making us feel like we're obligated.

GMs: Toss out the plot threads to your players. Have some stories resolve quickly, and have others that grow and evolve. Know when a story should resolve. Know when a story should remain open. End a session on a cliffhanger. Make your players wish the next session were tomorrow instead of next month.

Players: Give your characters the personalities and histories that make the GM and other players wonder what's going to happen next. Talk to your GM about long-term stories that will entertain yourself, your GM, and everyone else. When will your character's history catch up with her? When will your character finally realize the truth about that letter? Who is the mysterious stranger that only appears on the equinox?

Girl Scouts: Bring more Thin Mints.

Because I really like Thin Mints.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Dungeon Master's Guide** (*1st Edition*, for *AD&D*), p. 111

(Two stars) "If you, the reader, ever expect to be dropped into a primitive time or timeline, memorize this. . ."

by EJ Ford

Art by Rogerio Vilela and Phil Reed

Jack slumped against the wall to the left of the door and checked the cylinder of his .38 Police Positive. Three shots left. Wiping dirty sweat from his eyes, he considered his chances. That's enough slugs for the two remaining guardians of this dump with one to spare. With a flick of the wrist, he readied the pistol then turned to pull the door open.

The door swung inward as he reached for the knob. A nauseating odor wafted out of the room -- the smell of blood and offal and filthy hair -- and with a crawly feeling at the back of his neck, Jack suddenly thought he knew what these bastards had done with the missing girls. When the first ropy tentacle of skin, bone and slime snaked out of the darkness, he realized he was completely wrong.

* * *

At this point in a game, the poor sap playing Jack Smart, Private Eye, has to make a quick roll of the dice. In **GURPS** or any other game simulating the horror genre, there has to be a way to describe the process of losing control. In horror novels and movies, characters routinely lose the ability to act on their own. Sanity rolls, "fright checks," whatever you call them, they are an important part of the genre. Panicking, shrieking, vomiting, fainting; anything but the sort of rational, devastating response that players will come back with, given a chance. A look at something truly horrible should have this effect. You shouldn't be able to see a guy turn into a werewolf and just start blazing away with the silver bullets.

The problem is that a player incapacitated by fear and, potentially, madness makes for a frustrating participant in the play of the game. If the players can't do anything, the novelty of having a character that has just acquired a new ten-point disadvantage will wear off quickly.

What's a Game Master to do? You can't have the players sailing through your haunted house without having the characters catch some of the chills and spill along the way. But, you can't drive the players all nuts, because they *will* quit coming back for more. It's just like you killed the whole party; after a while, your players will find something less aggravating to do. As it happens, there are a few solutions, ones that involve a little extra work for the Game Master but have a more satisfying pay-off all around.

The first piece of advice is one that you see a lot in books about writing horror stories: describe the details. You want to tickle the players interest and get them involved in the scene. To do that, you need to describe details. The smell of a darkened room. The look of a pool of inhuman blood. The sound of a limb breaking and tearing through skin. If you paint a picture with words, it will make it easier, and more honorable, for your players to fail a fright check and flip out. If you just tell the players to make a fright check after they see a skeleton, with no details, they are going to be more than

miffed if their characters go bonkers. Just as brand names and spy jargon are essential to a good espionage game, the street cred of a horror game is the ability of the game master to make the players themselves flinch.

Obviously, a good first step is to read and watch everything you can about the topics you intend to inflict on your flinching friends. However, don't just watch movies about the plot points. Everyone has seen vampire movies, and those aren't the details that will shock, scare, and ultimately amuse, your players. Instead, break your adventure into segments and make a point of keying sensory information on each scene. If they are in a sewer, never let them forget the stench and the feel of greasy slime around their legs. Make the players wish they were wearing waders! If they are seeing something horrible, focus on the sound of the creature dragging itself forward, crushing pieces of furniture in its path. Always make sure you describe the roar of gunfire and the smell of smoke, too.

Placing the emphasis on non-visual cues is important, because people think with their eyes but they remember with all their senses. If you just tell the players what something looks like, they'll think about it for a second, then start in with the silver bullets again. You want the players to think twice. You do that by making them feel like they are right there, in the middle of the action. If the players believe the scene, they won't mind acting a little loopy for a bit.

The second way to get your players accustomed to losing control is to put a plant in the group. I can't emphasize the value of this enough. People like to be part of a good joke. Let your player know that their participation will make it a more enjoyable night for the whole group, then let them steal a few scenes with their best improvisation. In a group of good role-players, this is usually incentive enough. If you need more, promise the player and opportunity for his or her character to find some hidden clue. Have their hysterical character accidentally reveal a cache of hidden weapons or information. Promise the player a big reward in experience points at the end of the game.

This technique also works for more fatal tricks. If you have a player who is getting sick of their feeble character and wants to play something new, let the character volunteer to get smeared by the monster. If you can do it with completes secrecy, you'll scare the pants off the other players as "good ol' Joe" simultaneously goes insane and runs shrieking right into the maw of the glistening beast at the bottom of the stairs. Make "Joe's" death as graphic as possible. Describe how "Joe" is bitten in two by the beast (don't forget to use a sound cue!). Make sure the player running "Joe" knows to keep fighting, screaming and, finally, begging for the other characters to put him out of his misery. Trust me, the other players won't forget it even if they subsequently find out that "Joe's" player was in on it.

A final technique involves the least stress all around. Telescope time. This tip has less to do with horror in specific than the others, in a way, because all games can use a little trimming. If no players can act, don't torture them by telling them what the monsters are doing to them; cut to a scene with the survivors and give them a quick synopsis about why they are all now tied up-side down in a meat locker. Try not to take advantage of insane or otherwise incapacitated characters. Remember: pointless deaths in movies usually just make you want to change channels; no one wants to be forced to sit through hours of that. Skip periods of research, recovery, or captivity if you need to. Tell the

players just enough about those periods so they get the plot points and the sense of incapacity without actually making the players deal with real inactivity. Keep the action moving, even if the game-time is crawling.

In some cases, players will short-circuit these techniques, sneering through your descriptions and preventing your pre-arranged stunts from going off as planned. In other cases, your players will insist on getting a good look at a monster that will send their character into hours of real-time inactivity. And if elements of the team manage to avoid incapacitation, it's going to be tough to keep those out of action interested in the game. However, if you involve the players, both by using evocative descriptors and encouraging collusion, no one should mind too much when their character goes 'round the bend.

* * *

Jack felt his knees buckle as the ropy tentacle began to grip his leg. Pieces of the six girls protruded from the heap of flesh, bone, and jelly inching its way toward him. As consciousness began to fade, spinning away just as the dizzying stink of the monstrosity grew stronger; Jack heard a voice screaming. That's me, he thought.

When he awoke, days later in the sanitarium, his teeth chattered in the warm room as he tried to describe his last memories to his incredulous friends.

by Loki Carbis

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Phil Reed

GURPS Black Ops presents a history in which two alien races, the Prima and the Greys, have had huge impacts on our history. But maybe there's more going on here than meets the "human" eye. Why not broaden the horizons of the campaign? There's no reason not to include the full panoply of races from *GURPS Aliens* in a *GURPS Black Ops* game - and it will certainly surprise the players.

The basic setting is very similar to what is given out in the *GURPS Black Ops* book - except that the true reasons behind things are quite different. The Greys are not what they appear to be at all - the deals that have been made with them were in fact made with the Markann. And there's really no such thing as "the Prima" - what Argus has classified as the work of the Prima is actually the work of several alien races, notably the Irari, the Engai, the Jaril, the Auroras, the Traders and the Gerodians.

In fact, nearly every one of the races *GURPS Aliens* has come to Earth at one time or another - and many of them are still here, pursuing their inhuman goals. To better reflect the nature of such a campaign, minor changes to the game statistics and cultures of most of the alien races have been made, making them considerably more malign. Details on the changes to each race are given under their descriptions. GM's concerned about the differences can simply put this down to the differences in campaign tone and feel between *GURPS Aliens* and *GURPS Black Ops* - a *Black Ops* game requires much more malign alien races, with devious and inscrutable goals. Alternately, maybe the races are always like this when dealing with non-starfaring inferiors. No details are given for the Gloworms, Riders or Xenomorphs, since each of these races can be used as is. In any case, this is what they're up to on Earth.

An-Phar

The An Phar are here only the broadest sense of the term. What we think of as Greys are in fact dead An Phar, brought back to a semblance of life through advanced psybernetic technology, and remotely piloted by the Markann. Occasionally, when the psybernetic restraints fail, one of them is lost to the Markann. Dimly aware of its condition, and in constant pain, these An Phar frequently enter destructive rampages until brought down by either the Markann or Argus. Use Grey statistics from *GURPS Black Ops* adding Berserk (limitation: only when uncontrolled).

Auroras and Traders

These two most powerful and enigmatic of races have both visited Earth many times in the past. Many accounts of meetings with gods are likely distorted versions of these encounters. But where the Auroras have avoided Earth in recent centuries, preferring not to be bothered by the struggles of lesser races, the Traders have found a renewed interest, and have been happily making deals with anyone and everyone. It's only a matter of time before a Trader sells a human information or objects that could expose or even damage the other alien races on Earth. It's even possible that one or more already have (certainly, at the highest levels, Argus is aware of the Traders and longs to learn more of

them). Neither race needs any real changes, except that they are both somewhat more amoral.

Banduch

Although the Banduch are few, and are compelled to remain in hiding in lost worlds and dense jungles and swamps, they are a potent menace. They came to Earth literally millions of years ago, and made it their own. Their great intelligence and mighty psionics allowed them to survive the extinction of the dinosaurs that they had ruled, and to hide from humanity as it grew and developed. From behind the scenes, they deliberately retarded the development of humans, preventing technological and social progress. The arrival of the Kaa on Earth, tens of thousands of years ago, discomfited them - because the Kaa knew what they were, and set out to exterminate them. Ever since then, the Banduch have been fighting a defensive war against the Kaa, although the arrival of other species allowed them something of a break. A great conference of all Banduch was held, and it was decided to reclaim the planet for the Banduch alone. These days, Banduch minds manipulate the environmental and anti-technology lobbies, trying to bring about an end to industrialization. They also covertly leak information regarding the activities of other alien races to Argus. Banduch are similar to those presented in *GURPS Aliens*, but do not possess the Advantage of Empathy, or the Disadvantages of Truthfulness or Non-Violence. They do however possess the Disadvantage of Greedy (which applies mostly to food, mates and territory in Banduch culture).

Cidi

No one knows what the Cidi want - but they are here. They hide among terrestrial animals such as squirrels and possums. For the most part, they seem to wish to be left alone, although they sometimes participate in suicide attacks on electrical installations of all sorts. In actuality, the Cidi are engaged in very careful study of humanity, preparatory to eventual invasion. They are methodical and very, very cautious, and are quite happy to let Argus take out any competition before they themselves take out humanity. Cidi are physically the same as in *GURPS Aliens*, but add the Mental Disadvantages Careful and Reclusive.

Crystal Computers

As a planet-bound race, the Crystal Computers are not found on Earth. Which is a lucky break for humanity.

Engai

As amoral and jaded sophisticates, the Engai are always interested in newly discovered alien cultures like Earth. At any given time, several of them are on the planet seeking distraction. They rarely act in concert, and never initiate contact with any other alien race. If another alien race should interfere with the activities of an Engai, it is equally likely that the Engai will punish them for their temerity or simply depart, claiming to have been "getting bored with this game anyway". Many Engai suffer from the Disadvantage Solipsist.

Fasanni

The Fasanni presence on Earth is limited to impartial observers working with other alien races. They don't much care about the fate of humanity, other than in a dry, intellectual fashion. Fasanni are basically uninterested in all other alien races as individuals, but fascinated by alien cultures. This is well known to the various other races who allow them to tag along, but each one hopes that one day the Fasanni will decide to join with them. Unfortunately for the Fasanni, they have so far be unable to deal with humans directly, instead getting all their information second hand. If ever a reliable means of impersonating humans is developed by the Fasanni, the other races may be in for a shock - humans and Fasanni have much in common, and the historical struggle of humans to solve problems without violence would be much-admired by Fasanni. Fasanni are unchanged, although less sympathetic to others.

Gerodians

The Gerodians, along with the Jaril, are largely responsible for Earth legends of Titans, giants and ogres. Both races have visited Earth in the past and may well do so again in the future. Gerodians on Earth are vicious scientists and doctors to primitive cultures, who always prophesy alien invasion and treat humans in a way that supposedly prepares them for this eventuality. In this setting, the Gerodian Code of Honour and Sense of Duty are modified by the addition of Sadism - although they honestly believe that what they do to other races is "for their own good" the simple fact is that this is merely a rationalization.

Gormelites

Many centuries ago, another race (which one is not known) brought several small colonies of Gormelites to Earth, to serve as slaves in their facilities. Although the facilities are long gone, many of the Gormelites survived, and have lived in the wild for centuries. They are variously known as Yeti, Sasquatch and so on. Their few villages are very well hidden, and Gormelite technology is at approximately Stone Age levels (TL3). Add Stealth-IQ, Survival (Wilderness)-IQ and Tracking-IQ to their suite of racial skills, but add also 4 levels of Primitive.

Irari

The Irari ruthlessness and devotion to knowledge has brought them to Earth many times. Seeing the human race as little more than animals, the Irari have conducted many bizarre experiments on us. They are particularly fascinated by the human capacity for religious belief, which they do not share. It is probable that many legends regarding angels and other winged divine figures are in fact memories of Irari experiments. Certainly the Aztec deity known as Queztlcoatl was an Irari - and it is possible that the myth of Daedulus and Icarus contains some hints as to how to defeat them. An insoluble labyrinth would definitely pose an irresistible challenge to an Irari. Add Insatiably Curious and Callous.

Jaril

GURPS Aliens details a huge scheme to move the Jaril to a more favourable planet on behalf of un-named alien races. That planet is the Earth. The Jaril were settled here 10,000 years ago, during the last Ice Age. Like the Gerodians, they appear often in Earth legends as giants, titans or ogres. They are mostly a subterranean race, and have added to the natural tunnels of this planet considerably. Jaril craft have been specially modified to fly these long tunnels, occasionally emerging from extinct volcanoes, cave mouths or the sea. Most reports of "flying saucers" will be Jaril craft - the race is obsessed with finding out what the other races are up to. They still consider the humans to be primitive savages, which may lead to a rude awakening for them in the near future. The Jaril are basically unchanged in this setting, although they are a lot less worried about offending other races - subtract their Sense of Duty.

Kaa

The Kaa have been here for longer than any other race (GM's interested in a very weird **Black Ops** game could make them identical to the Serpent Men of **GURPS Conan** and **GURPS Cthulhupunk**). Tales of snake or lizard men are sufficiently widespread that they could pop up anywhere. Wherever they are, they are mortal enemies of the Banduch - the two reptiles have each consider the Earth to be rightfully theirs and the other to be interlopers. The Kaa, as one of the most evil races in **GURPS Aliens**, are unchanged in this setting.

Kronin

The Kronin can pass for human with cosmetics and disguises - and some of them do, in pursuit of their goal. Decades ago, a Kronin ship was infested by Verms and crashed somewhere on Earth. It is buried deeply in the ground, but the Kronin are sure that the Verms survived and will one day attack Earth in force. Due to the circumstances of the Verms'

arrival, the Kronin feel obligated to find and destroy the Verms before they destroy humanity. Unfortunately, the Kronin are only concerned with humanity as a whole - individual humans who get in the way of the mission are dealt with in a swift and deadly fashion. Kronin are played with no changes - but note that most of them will skills like Disguise and Acting in order to better pass among humans.

Liook Sujaan

The Liook Sujaan are among the few totally benevolent alien races. Millennia ago, their minds detected the incredible psionic potential of humanity, and the race has taken an active interest in seeing humanity reach its potential ever since. They have often influenced the minds of humans, and many sacred sites and standing stones are actually members of this race. Generally, the Liook try to influence humanity to look to the stars, since they wish to have allies out there. This is the major reason why Stonehenge and other such sites are considered "ancient observatories." (See GURPS Places of Mystery for more information on Stonehenge and standing stones in general.) Liook Sujaan are played with no serious differences, other than the fact that most of the ones on Earth have the Auto-Teleport power in addition to whatever other psionics they possess.

Markann

The Markann's inferiority complex is even more pronounced in this world - they will not even show themselves. The Greys are in fact remotely piloted drones - created from psybernetically modified and controlled An Phar corpses - each of them doing the work of one or more Markann. Some few abducted humans have seen Markann - but most see only their cyborg servants. (This would be a perfect time to dust off the old Flight 19 adventure - the players could easily be led to believe that the Markann are a separate race unconnected to the Greys, or possibly even feuding with them.) Markann are as presented in *GURPS Aliens*.

Memer and Saret

Memer and Saret are not found on Earth. Quite simply, there's nothing here that they want.

Mmmm

Mmm is unaware of the existence of Earth. Were Mmm to become aware of this planet, and the activities of various races on it, it would seek further information, most likely planting a node or two somewhere out of the way, and using a few very discreet drones. Once it had done sufficient research, it is likely the Mmm would be sufficiently revolted to attempt to destroy all other sentient life in known space, rather than risk having it run against Mmm itself.

Pachekki

Quite simply, the Pachekki are here for an outright invasion. They require no better justification than the distribution of land and sea on this planet. But the Pachekki are not fools either - their invasion plans called for the seas to be conquered first. Unfortunately for them, others had the same idea first. Pachekki are much the same, with the exceptions that females now possess Berserk and males now possess Sadism - these in addition to their normal racial suite.

Purulu

The Purulu want the Earth - but only because everyone else seems to, and thus, it must have some value. So they've been trying to take over the oceans of the Earth with the assistance of their unwilling allies, the Tamile.

Sparrials

Perhaps the most unlikely allies that humanity has are the Sparrials. They followed the other races to Earth simply out of curiosity, and the vast majority of those who came got bored and left fairly quickly. But those who stayed are a constant irritant to the other races. The Sparrials have bent their thieving talents to the task of frustrating everyone involved with the alien activities on Earth (which in their view includes all humans). Sparrials care nothing for security and secrecy, and it is possible that the legends of gremlins and other such creatures that have arisen in the last century are based on encounters with Sparrials. (Certainly the theft of small, expensive and vital parts of complex machines is very much in keeping with Sparrial culture.) Sparrials can be used as is.

Tamile

The Tamile are much the same as is *GURPS Aliens*, saving only that they are an aquatic species - and that they are owned as a race by the Purulu. The Tamile were bioengineered to be the best artists in the galaxy to satisfy Purulu cravings. But when the Purulu learned about Earth, they could not find any other mercenaries who would work for them. So the unfortunate Tamile were pressed into service, despite their manifest unsuitability for the job. At the current time, the Tamile and Pachekki are locked in a stalemate under the seas. Only the intervention of a third party will break this deadlock.

Treefolk

The Treefolk aren't much found on Earth either. If they were here, they'd be similar in motives to the Banduch, although acting completely independently of them.

Truul

No one knows how they got here (or at least, no one's owning up to it). But there are at least four or five hundred Truul running around losoe on planet Earth. Most of them inoffensively serve human masters until their deaths - although recent reports about far eastern sweatshops could point to another possible fate for the race.

Verms

As stated above, somewhere, deep underground, there is a nest of Verms, slowly tunneling their way to the surface. Argus doesn't know it yet, but its deadliest day is approaching.

Adventure Seeds

Bad Dreams

As the psionic war for domination of the Earth heats up, sensitives everywhere are having nightmares and experiencing psychosomatic pains. The actual cause of this is the negative psychic energy left lying around as a result of this covert war. Participants include the Banduch, the Kronin and the Liook Sujaan, among others. An adventure based on this seed is the perfect way to introduce any of these races, or even all of them, and their covert war.

The Lost World

If the characters are sent to investigate any "lost world" type areas, this is a

perfect time to bring in the Jaril or Gerodians. The occasional individual of each race will try to set himself (or herself) up as the "living deity" of a primitive tribe or two, and a lost world is where it would work best. Alternately, the Gormelites or the Banduch, either of which will more than likely be assumed to be native to Earth, could be introduced.

What The?

There's always the possibility that an untimely death could lead to the dissection, and thus, the exposure, of an alien life form on Earth. Although many of them look like Earth species, their alien biologies would quickly give them away in such a situation. Several alien races regularly impersonate humans, and still others pretend to be other non-human species, and any of these would be likely candidates. Among the human impersonators, this includes the Engai, the Kronin and the Truul. Other likely possibilities include the Banduch, the Cidi, the Gormelites and the Purulu. (For a real change of pace, it could even be a Liook Sujaan - although how anyone would end up dissecting a rock is a difficult question that will need to be answered in this case.)

The Verms Arise

Some day soon, that single Verm nest is going to emerge. What happens next is entirely up to the GM, and on what scale the GM wants to use the Verms. It could be a single isolated outbreak, or a concerted invasion. In the latter case, it's possible that some of the other alien races could emerge from hiding to help humanity battle the Verm menace. The Kronin, the Liook Sujaan and the Banduch are the most likely candidates to do this, although the Kaa are also a possibility. In the former case, it is likely that the Kronin would deem their honour satisfied, and depart Earth shortly afterwards - although if humanity acquitted itself well enough, the Kronin might decide to ally with us, and help Earth become a part of galactic society.

Time to Take Off the Kid Gloves

I've been getting some good press around here recently. Granted, folks have said, "I don't agree with John, but I see his point and he writes pretty good."

I do not write "pretty good." I write *well*.

Get your high boots on, folks. We're about to get *real dirty*.

* * *

This month, we're talking about Problem Players.

Now, the chief problem with these guys is that most of them are friends of yours. Like Bob who sits at the corner of the table with his laptop open, playing *Starcraft* when he should be paying attention, with his Übermonster character all full of loopholes, who barely looks at his dice when he rolls them (and hopes nobody else does because they'd see that 17 he rolled is really a 7), who won't go along with the rest of the party because that would "compromise his character concept." Yeah. That guy. We're talking about *him*.

This month, I'm going to give you a few pointers on how to deal with Bob, taking into consideration that he's probably a friend of yours that you've known for a few dozen years, who is really a nice guy, and you don't want to hurt his feelings by telling him that he's ruining the game for everyone else.

And, by the way, that is the *real* way to handle this situation. If Bob is screwing up your game, you *tell him* he's screwing up your game. But if that tactic doesn't work (or you're afraid of the repercussions of doing it), then try a few of the following tactics.

Understand that you will probably not be able to use *all* of these methods. Also understand that they should be used with caution. Finally, understand that half the intention of this installment is to provide you with a cathartic experience.

You might not be able to use *any* of these techniques, but by the end of it all, you'll sure *wish* you could.

Breaking the Cord

There's something I like to call "the PC umbilical cord." Most of you have figured out what this means without me explaining it, but just in case. . .

The players are supposed to be a *group*. That is, they make decisions together; they act as a unit; they face the consequences of their actions *together*. Player parties have very little room for the Snake Pliskens of the world. Everyone in the group plays a specific role in the group, complementing each other's strengths and weaknesses.

Every once in a while, however, you get that dark loner. You know the guy. He's a bad man but he's very good at what he does and what he does isn't very pretty. That guy. When he joins a party of bounty hunters, he always kills the target rather than capturing him because "The Weed of Evil Bears Bitter Fruit." Despite the fact the party is trying to act as a unit, he always acts on his own, living by his own rules, by his own code of ethics. And when you confront *the player* about the problem, he just shrugs and says, "That's the way my character is," or worse, he gets offended and starts spouting the time-honored favorite: "Don't make me compromise my character concept!"

Now the key to preventing this guy from ruining your campaign is. . . don't let him make that kind of character! Unfortunately, players are sneaky. They'll make characters that *look* friendly and willing to Play Well With Others, but when the crunch is on, they sneak into the shadows, steal all the loot and tell the others that they have *no clue* what happened to the booty they were after.

Well, this guy doesn't last long in my games because I invoke a little thing we like to call "consequences." Here's how it works.

Every action has an equal and opposite reaction, right? That means the next time the Merciless Killer Without a Heart goes and whacks the NPC the party is supposed to *capture* (for ransom, for the law to deal with, whatever), you give him some time, then spring The Law on him.

The Law shows up at 3:45 AM (the time All Bad Things happen in my games) with stun guns, tear gas, tasers and all other kinds of nasty wickedness. They capture the entire party and throw them all in jail for interrogation regarding the illegal murder of The Guy We Were Supposed to Take Alive. Then, spend the rest of the evening interrogating the party. Each one, by himself, under a sunlamp. Go out and get one at Wal-Mart; they usually cost under ten bucks. Use the same tactics cops use when they interrogate prisoners. Tell them that their friends have ratted them out. Tell them that they're going to spend a *real long* time in prison. Then, when they *think* they've beaten the rap, reveal to them that the guy they were chasing was an undercover cop. *Now*, they're facing Murder 1 charges, which means life in prison (or the death penalty, depending where they're at). Sooner or later, one of them will give up The Killer Without a Cause. Either that, or evidence shows up that gives the cops a solid case against him.

Then, we have the trial. A lot of game sessions can go toward a trial. Or, if you prefer, you can do it the short way: go right to the verdict. Of course, Mr. Don't Make Me Compromise My Character is found guilty as charged and gets sent to prison.

For life.

Now, I don't know about you, but I have a rule in my games: you don't get to make another character until the one you're playing dies. That means, Bob gets to play his perfect combat machine in an 8x8 cell for the rest of his natural life.

"What are you doing this round, Bob?"

"I'm watching the cockroach crawl across my cell."

For life.

If he asks really nice (and agrees not make that kind of character again), I'll let him make a new character. Of course, a few years later, Mr. Bad Ass breaks out of prison and goes after the party for revenge.

As an NPC.

Played by Robert DeNiro.

The Laws of the Table & Kharma Dice

Now, I have to admit, this one is *seriously mean*. While I usually play dirty with my players, I also play fair. By "playing fair," I mean that like a mystery writer, I show them everything they need to solve the situation at hand.

However. . .

I have a limit, and that limit is my players' enjoyment. When one player starts stepping on the other players' fun, I start fighting fire with fire. Specifically, I mean the players who feel it necessary to "break the game." They take advantage of rules. They lie about rolls. They make rolls for skills they don't have. You know who I'm talking about. I'm talking about cheaters.

(Usually I don't give a rat's petunia about cheating. Players *expect* the game master to cheat, but for some reason, game masters are supposed to poo-poo players cheating. Maybe this is because the GM is expected to cheat *for* the players.

Maybe. As GM, I may hit the players below the belt, but I'm also looking out for their better interests.)

But then there are players who feel they need to break *other* rules. You know, the ones not listed in the book. "The Laws of the Table," one of my players called them. They boil down to a few simple rules:

I. Pay Attention
II. Don't Invoke Monty Python
III. Don't Read at the Table
IV. If You Must Speak, Whisper or Pass a Note

Those kind of rules. Players who can't seem to follow these simple rules of etiquette really chap my hide. And so, in order to deal with breaches of etiquette, I use Kharma Dice.

I've mentioned this one somewhere else, but not everyone is a *7th Sea* fan, so I'll put it here, too (and I'll be brief). In short, whenever someone breaks a Table Law, put a black die in a bowl in the center of the table. Then, later on in the game, when *another* player is making a really crucial roll, remove the die from the bowl, turn to the player and say:

"YOU FAIL."

The emphasis is important.

In short, the rude actions of one player crush someone else's success. I've found this keeps the *Boldy Brave Sir Robin* choruses down to a minimum.

If you like, you can also use Good Kharma Dice that work in exactly the opposite manner. Whenever a player does something selfless, courageous or noteworthy, give them a white die. When another player is making a crucial roll, they can give that white die to the player and you tell them:

"YOU SUCCEED."

Again, the emphasis is important.

There's Always Someone Bigger

Now this is a *nasty* trick. I used to use it a lot when I was running **Champions**. As we all know, there are a few hundred bazillion loopholes in the Hero System, and we've abused all of them in our time (remind me to tell you about Multiplier Man someday). But abusing character creation rules has always seemed so petty to me, especially when people are *proud* of it.

("Great. You made a combat monster. Big effin' deal. What's his mother's name?")

So, in order to deal with the Power Player, I taught him a rule that orks (and all the other one hit die monsters in the world) know all to well:

There's Always Someone Bigger Than Yourself.

First, I designed an equally abusive Combat Monster to deal with our Bruiser Bob, but that ain't enough. No, sir. Not if you're gonna play dirty. Since Bob feels it necessary to cheat to have a good time (and let's not mince words, that's *exactly* what he's doing), it's time for you to show him that you can cheat, too. In fact, you can cheat *better* than he can, which makes you a better person. He who cheats best (makes the best broken character and/or bends, twists and bends the rules best) wins, right? So, here's what you do.

Get yourself three sets of identical dice. This is easy if you're playing a game that requires only one die type like *Vampire* or (coincidentally enough) **Champions**. Then, arrange a set of those dice for the perfect roll behind your

screen. Save 'em. Don't touch 'em.

Finally, when you've beaten Bruiser Bob to a bloody pulp, make a roll. Ignore it. Look very sadly at the dice behind your screen - the ones you arranged before the game began. Then, lift the screen and show the players your "roll."

A critical hit. Bruiser Bob's turned into Bloody Pulp Bob. Too bad. Time to make a new character.

The Rules Lawyer

Now, under most circumstances, Rules Lawyer Bob is your friend. He knows all those little nuances of the game that you can't keep in your head and reminds you when you need a nudge.

However. . .

There's that fellow who's always telling you: "You're doing that wrong."

Or, "That's not how that works."

Or, "Let me look that up."

This guy is The Enemy. Instead of relying on your judgement to make a snap decision, he wants to play things By The Book. Instead of accepting that you're improvising things, juggling story, character, narrative *and* a rulebook, he's insisting on everything going by What the Author Intended. And if he does it enough, players start looking to *him* for rulings rather than you. This kind of challenge to our authority is unhealthy. Therefore, you have to do something *drastic*. Something *dramatic*. Something *dirty*.

First, take away his character sheet. Then, tell him if he doesn't remember how many dice to roll, or if he rolls the wrong number of dice, or if he forgets something on his character sheet. . .

HE FAILS.

It's all about emphasis.

This isn't so much being mean as holding Rules Lawyer Bob to the same standards he expects from you. If *you're* supposed to know all the rules, if *you're* supposed to be the Rule Encyclopedia, holding everything to memory.

There is nothing in the rules that says you *can't* do this. Therefore, you can.

Of course, if this doesn't work out for you, try a different tack.

I'll use the Storyteller System as an example. Whenever Bob starts his rules ranting, take away his 10-siders and give him 4-siders.

"Here, Bob. You make all your rolls with *these*."

There is *nothing* in the rules that says you *can't* do this. Therefore, you can.

When Rules Lawyer Bob gets hit with a blind spell, blindfold him.

"What did you roll, Bob?"

"I can't tell. I'm blindfolded."

"Well then. . . **YOU FAIL.**"

Finally, if he insists on looking things up. . . let him. While he's looking things up in a book, the rest of the game goes on without him.

"Bob, you just got hit. You took a stunning amount of damage."

"How? I didn't hear any dice roll."

"He didn't need to roll. You weren't paying attention. You were looking at something else."

That'll learn 'em.

Last Words

Like I said above, the techniques this week are generally mean, nasty and underhanded. They are *not* for everyone. Most of the time, I really don't need to use them. . . more than once.

But the *reason* to use them is specific. I don't play a roleplaying game to win. I don't create a character to demonstrate how to "break" a character creation system. When the Game Master speaks, I listen.

The fact of the matter is this: everyone in the group either wins or loses. If everyone is having a wonderful time, we all win. If one player decides that he wants to have fun *in spite of everyone else*, he's selfish. If he feels he needs to show off his character design skills in such a way that messes with other players' enjoyment, he's acting like a twelve year old jerk with serious confidence issues.

Granted, he's also your high school buddy Bob. And that makes things all too complicated. I hear so many people saying, "Gaming is a social activity." Then why the hell are so many gamers lacking in any kind of social skills? Maybe its because gaming has always about blind acceptance. So many of us came to gaming because we were "outsiders" of one kind or another.

But that doesn't mean we can't learn. And that doesn't mean we can't grow.

Pyramid Pick

All Our Yesterdays (for the Star Trek RPGs)

Published by Last Unicorn Games

Written by Steve Kenson, James Kiley, S. John Ross, Steven S. Long and Kenneth Hite

128 pages, $20

Where would *Star Trek* be without time travel? Up the timestream without a plot device, that's where. So where would the *Star Trek* role playing game systems be without time travel? Same place. . . and time. ***All Our Yesterdays*** allows you to take your campaign, no matter which incarnation of the popular franchise warps your nacelles, into the fourth dimension. . . and the fifth, and the sixth, depending on the theory you subscribe to.

The book starts with a discussion of that very subject, going over all the trippy little details Starfleet has gathered of how time travel works, what the hazards are, and how we've managed to do it. By accident or orb, sabotage or solar slingshot, all the known tricks (and a few that aren't) make it into the tense-snarled lexicon. Definitions abound, so players and Game Masters talking temporal rifts and temporal flux will know whereof they speak. A sort of time travelogue of hot spots for high activity is also included.

Parallel universes, those alternate histories existing next door to ours or created by severe temporal anomalies, get the business too. How to get there and back, how to make and unmake parallels, and how to play your twisted other selves are covered. *Star Trek* has suggested many such worlds itself, and Last Unicorn Games adds some gems of its own.

The bulk of the book covers the activities of the Department of Temporal Investigations, the time-and-history sensitive group introduced in the *Deep Space Nine* episode "Trials and Tribble-ations." The Temporal Prime Directive is their raison d'être. It's their job to watch history for changes, debrief Starfleet personnel who have affected the timestream, and prevent - or fix - alterations to the past. GMs wishing to run a DTI-centric campaign will find no end of useful tidbits on the equipment, training and structure of this most unusual organization.

If you're going to send your group traipsing into the past or future with phaser and tricorder, you'll need new character goodies. PCs working for the DTI will want the overlays and Tours of Duty specific to those agents. If you're just Timmy Time Traveler, you'll still benefit from the list of advantages, disadvantages and skills - some of which are psionic abilities that let you detect and manipulate the ebb and flow of time.

Your companions on this journey are a virtual who's who of the Star Trek universe. Each race has its own views on the viability of the phenomenon, and there are surprising facts aplenty - the Ferengi may have the most advanced temporal technology, and the Borg may be the least likely to use it. That doesn't stop any one person from turning renegade and wreaking havoc across the galaxy, so you also get information about what antagonists are likely to do with time travel.

All Our Yesterdays is a metabook, part of "The Expanded Universe" series of books for use with the whole gamut of *Star Trek Core Rules*, so the supplement covers - what else? - a lot of space and time. The Krenim, feared time manipulators of the Delta Quadrant, have their own racial package, and their massive timeship is included with a swell Jane's Guide of time-traveling starcraft from the four corners of the galaxy. Unlikely travelers like Q, the Prophets and, well, the Travelers get their own peculiar take on the subject as well. A timeline running through the book delineates as much of *Star Trek* history as will fit, from the Big Bang to the Kelvan invasions of the next millennium. The timeline is accompanied in the text by a history of time travel, putting things into perspective (so you're not left wondering why

we don't time travel at will after Kirk did it in *Star Trek IV*).

Tying it all together are gamemaster hints and story seeds to make the tangled skein of time as smooth a tale-telling tapestry as possible. Resolving paradox, making future history more a tool and less a fiat, and using time travel as a way to break the role-playing rut are just a few of the subjects that get a clear and concise description.

As a standalone, *All Our Yesterdays* is a well-done supplement. As part of "The Expanded Universe," it's a good omen that bodes well for other upcoming books (especially ***Though a Glass Darkly***; the two ought to make a good pairing). The writing is casual while still being fun and informative, and there's not much about time travel in the franchise that hasn't been touched on. It's all made workable by simple, straightforward description, logic, and clever extrapolations.

There are a few places where the narrative style gives way, some might say by necessity, to scientific gobbledygook. If you've ever watched much *Trek*, you know it's a hallmark of many scripts. But when it shows up in a supplement, seeing such technical details presented as though we're meant to understand them is a bit off-putting.

The book gets a little repetitive in spots, and at times it seems like they're going over old ground (or at least ground from earlier in the book). The (admittedly occasional) duplication of ideas and concepts gives you a feeling of deja vu, time travel notwithstanding. An index, some extra work grouping like concepts, or adding more page references wouldn't have hurt.

The artwork starts shaky but gets much better as you progress through the book. The art and designs faded into the background gets in the way here and there - why so much blue shading? - but it's hardly crippling. Overall, this is a good-looking book.

Whether your Star Trek game is just getting stale or you want to give your players a whole new menu of problems to deal with, ***All Our Yesterdays*** is a deft and elegant solution, making many such problems a thing of the past.

-- Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

Saxons! (for Pendragon RPG)

Published by Green Knight Publishing

By Roderick Robertson

144 pages, $24.95

When it comes to historical fantasy roleplaying games, only a few
stand out as worthy of serious attention. Chief among them is *King
Arthur Pendragon* from Green Knight Publishing (formerly from Chaosium). Over the years, *Pendragon* has
produced some of the best historical fantasy supplements and adventures ever produced. Nearly every one shows an
attention to detail and respect for its source material that continues to amaze me. It's little wonder that *Pendragon*
remains a critical (and fan) favorite after a decade and a half.

The latest release for the line, *Saxons! Wolves in the Fold of Arthur's Britain*, continues in that fine tradition while at
the same time highlighting the problems inherent in historical gaming. *Saxons!* provides plenty of detail on the
Germanic invaders who play such a prominent role in Arthurian legendry. Like previous culture books for Pendragon,
this one includes extensive details on Saxon culture, religion, and locales, as well as new rules for character generation
and magic. As good as these details are, *Saxons!* is a book in conflict with itself, unsure of whether it's presenting a
historical view of its subject, or a mythological one in keeping with Arthurian conventions.

Let's take a look at the supplement's contents and you'll see what I mean. The book begins with an introduction that
includes a short glossary of Old English words (and pronunciations) to add historical authenticity. I applaud this in
principle, but found its application jarring at times. By far the worst offenders are the uses of "cwene" for "queen" and
"cyningdom" for "kingdom." Verisimilitude adds a lot of flavor to the game, but one can get carried away, as I believe
the author did in these cases.

Chapter 1 is an excellent introduction to Saxon culture. Topics as diverse as lineage, law, religion, and women are all
given proper treatment. The level of detail is, in my opinion, just right: enough to add flavor to any campaign using
Saxons but not so much that they bog down the narrative. I didn't feel like I was reading a history textbook as I perused
these pages - high praise for a historical fantasy game!

Chapter 2 describes the history of the Saxons in Britain from Roman times to the end of Arthur's reign. Of particular
interest are the discussions of how the Saxons fit into each Pendragon's five campaign phases. Also included is
information about the various Saxon kingdoms and how their status changes during each phase. Game Masters will be
very pleased with these details, as they make it easy to integrate Saxons! into their ongoing campaigns.

Chapter 3 is a lengthy gazetteer of southeastern Britain, known as "the Saxon Shore" during Roman times. Like
previous Pendragon products, this chapter outlines the most important - and interesting - locales within its purview.
Many of the sites include minor details that could easily spark adventures of their own, making this a valuable addition
to the Game Master's repertoire. Like the kingdoms described in chapter 2, there are historical notes on how the locales
change over time, something I must applaud once more.

Chapter 4 includes a complete character generation sequence for Saxon characters. These rules supersede or modify
those in the basic Pendragon rulebook in certain areas. Given that Green Knight has announced a 5th Edition of *King
Arthur Pendragon* for 2001, this comes as no surprise. The bulk of the chapter, though, is dedicated to the
peculiarities of Saxon player characters, such as their names, social classes, and beginning skills. I was quite pleased to

see a surfeit of information on families and lineages, important parts of Saxon culture. The chapter makes it easy to provide a character with a heritage worthy of the sagas told by these Germanic warriors. Likewise, there are rules for Saxon children fostered by British knights after Arthur's great victory at Badon Hill.

Chapter 5 is a campaign set in and around Haestingas (Hastings) for a group of Saxon player characters. While the adventures are quite interesting, even compelling, they lack much of the magic and romance I normally associate with *Pendragon*. Perhaps it's the lack of chivalry and courtly manners that gives me this impression. However, I suspect it has more to do with the conflict I mentioned earlier. In this chapter, history wins out over fantasy and, for me at least, suffers for it.

Chapter 6 is a lengthy treatment of the four-day Battle of Badon in which Saxon power is broken for a generation. I was left a little cold by this chapter, but that's probably due to my indifference to Pendragon's battle rules. Others may well appreciate the detail. Chapter 7 gives the Game Master game statistics for a variety of enemies, both human and supernatural. This chapter will prove useful even in non-Saxon campaigns, as it nicely differentiates between various tribal and ethnic groups. Rounding out the chapter are some maps of sample Saxon towns and fortifications.

Chapter 8 concludes the book with additional Saxon-specific rules for things like rune magic, boasting, and berserking. There are also rules for "glorious items" that have gained prestige due to their association with famous heroes of legend - another nice touch that adds a lot of flavor. Appended to the book is a serviceable map of southeastern Britain that suffers from being bound into the back of the book, thereby limiting its usability in play.

All in all, *Saxons!* is a worthwhile addition to any *Pendragon* fan's gaming library. The book is far from flawless, of course. It suffers mightily from a schizophrenia about whether its goal is to represent Saxons historically accurately or in a way that's true to Arthurian legend. There's a lot of genuinely useful information in its 144 pages, provided one can cut through this indecision. Here's hoping Green Knight will resolve this question, one that has long bedeviled most historical fantasy games.

-- James Maliszewski

Pyramid Pick

Nations of Théah: Book Three, Montaigne (for 7th Sea)

Published by Alderac Entertainment Group

Written by Kevin Wilson

128 pages, $19.95

If you are following the progression of the Nations of Théah series, you are witnessing the fruition of something that was only hinted at in the core *7th Sea* books. You can see that the countries that make up Théah's landscape are more than separate cultures with political boundaries. They are the embodiment of swashbuckling ideas and traditions.

The Pirate Nations explored swashbuckling on the high seas, clearly inspired by Errol Flynn movies and Rafael Sabatini novels. *Avalon* was about heroic fairy tales and the power of legends and myth. Now we have *Nations of Théah: Book Three, Montaigne*, a sourcebook that captures the bravado spirit of swashbuckling found in *The Three Musketeers* and other works by Alexandre Dumas (who is among those the book is dedicated to).

The first chapter deals with the history, people, and places of Montaigne. As you may or may not know, the nations of Théah have very loose parallels to the nations of Europe around and during the Restoration period. With that in mind, it is safe to say that Montaigne is a distant cousin, twice removed, of France. It is an incredibly wealthy nation that the world looks to as a trend setter in everything from fashion to art to military maneuvers.

The country is divided into fifteen provinces. These provinces are governed by noble families but ultimately ruled by l'Empereur Leon Alexandre du Montaigne XIV, a ruthless and hedonistic sorcerer king who has some world-shattering skeletons in his closet. The descriptions of the provinces are detailed and well thought out, each including useful information about prominent cities, populations, rulers, dialects, and other features. The numerous noble families are also given several pages of attention, setting up the political landscape that will likely play an important role in just about any adventure set in Montaigne.

However, despite its affluence and extravagance, this first chapter shows that Montaigne is not a nation without problems. It currently fights two separate wars, openly defies the teachings of the Vaticine Church, and treats its peasants miserably at best. These and other factors indicate serious troubles in the not too distant future, but those in charge show little concern. After all, Montaigne is the most powerful nation in Théah. What could possible go wrong?

Chapter Two presents Montaigne's major NPCs, giving portraits and biographies of the members of the royal family, the military, and other influential people. Like those found in the previous *Nations of Théah* books, these characters are engaging, entertaining, and ready to show up in your adventures.

Chapter Three presents some new, modular rules. A Montaigne specific version of the Destiny Spread (one of the mainstays of the Nations of Théah series) has returned, using Tarot cards to help round out new characters. The sorcery of the Montaigne nobility, Porté, is given a new Knack and some optional rules, and new Backgrounds and Advantages, like the comprehensive section dealing with regional Montaigne accents, are introduced as well.

Four other areas of this chapter are likely to get a lot of attention by players and GMs alike. These are the new fighting schools, rules for courtly intrigue, Puzzle Swords, and new mass combat rules and situations.

The three new fighting schools are Boucher, Rois et Reines, and Tout Près. Boucher is concerned with knife fighting, Rois et Reines is a bayonet technique taught to Musketeers, and Tout Près espouses that, "The best weapon is the one that's close at hand." In other words, it is the art of fighting with anything you can pick up and whack your opponent with. These schools appear to be well balanced, powerful but not game altering, and should lead to some interesting combat scenes when used.

Since Montaigne is such a social and political nation, it is good to see the inclusion of rules for courtly intrigue. Perhaps "rules" is too strong of a word, though. They are more like guidelines for actions that characters can take at court to get them involved with the various machinations going on there, such as starting fashion trends, asking for favors, hosting balls, and even matching wits with courtiers in verbal duels. These things and more are kept track of on a special Montaigne Courtly Intrigue Sheet, which should help GMs keep their sanity.

Puzzle Swords are the *7th Sea* equivalent of magic swords, and they are very cool. These weapons are legendary pieces of craftsmanship, concealing hidden switches and buttons that can unleash a variety of surprises, some mundane (like a Garotte being hidden in the hilt) and some seemingly mystical (like a ghostly property that renders the sword intangible unless wielded by the owner). These swords are handed down from generation to generation, and can only be acquired during character creation by spending Hero points. The exact number of Hero points necessary is determined from the results of rolling on several different charts. The more powerful the sword, the more it is going to cost. If you want one of these weapons after the start of the game, be prepared to do some earnest adventuring. Families do not give these weapons to just anyone.

New mass combat rules and situations are included because, as previously mentioned, Montaigne is the aggressor in the two largest skirmishes currently going on in Théah: one against Castille and the other against Ussura. Massed fire from rifle lines is covered (so GMs can recreate scenes like the one in the latest *Man in the Iron Mask* film), and new Heroic Actions for mass combat are given to be interspersed with the normal Heroic Actions from the GM's Guide. None of these will effect the way game is played, but they do help capture the "feel" of Montaigne.

The task of maintaining that particular "feel" is explored in the fourth chapter. The first few pages are intended for players and GMs to look over, containing essays on what it means to be a Hero from Montaigne. The importance of unity ("All for one and one for all!"), hints on how to get along with Heroes from other nations, tips on fighting with flair (with a superb example), and roleplaying courtly manners and intrigue are detailed in this section. The next section is for GM eyes only. The stats and dirty secrets of the NPCs introduced in Chapter Two are revealed, along with some new monsters that are unique to Montaigne, like Mirror Ghosts.

The book concludes with an overhead map of Charouse, the capital city of Montaigne, followed by deckplans for three prominent Montaigne ships, and four pre-generated characters that would make good PCs if you are teaching someone to play.

The author, Kevin Wilson, has done an impressive job of channeling Alexandre Dumas' particular style of swashbuckling into this book. The short fiction found between the chapters, the setting itself, and even the optional rules enforce and encourage swashbuckling with gusto.

If you have ever desired the opportunity to be like Athos, Porthos, Aramis, or d'Artagnan, you need to pay a visit to Montaigne.

-- Les Simpson

Murphy's Rules

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

Murphy's Rules

?

"The Evil One Stole My *Shatterzone*!"

I have never been surprised by *Indiana Jones*-esque Nazis bursting into my apartment, intent on taking my role-playing games.

At no time in recent memory have I caught cultists sprinting out of my game closet, box of RPGs in their cloaked arms.

There has never been a case where black suited men with sunglasses and questionable government ties have barged in to take role playing supplements.

Er, waitaminute. . .

Anyway, the point is this: There have been almost no instances of wholesale RPG abduction by The Bad Guys.

Keep that in mind.

Two weeks ago Wizards of the Coast announced the scaling back of its *Alternity* plans, with some supplements originally intended for publication now planned to be made available as free internet downloads or cancelled altogether.

Two weeks ago I created my first *Earthdawn* character. Last week Living Room Games announced an agreement with FASA Corporation where they would print new *Earthdawn* material, fourteen months after FASA had closed the line.

Five years ago I ran a *Star Trek* game. This was many years after FASA had closed its *Star Trek* line, and three years before Last Unicorn Games began theirs.

What's my point?

They can't take your games away. No matter what happens to your favorite game line, the Bad Guys can't take your games away.

While it may sound rather obvious to say this, I point it out because of the complaints I've heard, in the virtual and real worlds. "Company A has cancelled *Hypothetical RPG*! I guess I can't play it any more." Or, "Company B has scaled back its plans for the *Theoretical Line*! I suppose I'll sell my books on eBay." Or, "Company C has fired its cool line editor for the *Grim'n'Gritty Game* and replaced him with a sentient orangutan who wants to have a race of evil spacefaring bullfrogs invade the game universe! I guess the only logical thing to do is set my books on fire and throw them from atop a building."

Nonsense.

No matter what happens to your favorite game line, it can still be your favorite game line. There's no reason why you can't crack open an RPG boxed set printed in the Dark Ages (circa 1985) and play a fun campaign with it. If the company that makes your favorite card game goes bankrupt because it invested all its money in magic beans, that doesn't mean your card night ever needs to end. If the company that makes your current campaign world does something Really Stupid with its story line, there's no law that says you need to make it part of your story line.

Unlike many other pursuits, games age quite well. In contrast, go ask the vintage computer game players how well most games made before 1990 play on a Windows 98 Pentium III. Or ask a comic reader to borrow his X-Men collection from 1980-85 and wait for the excuses. But if you had the sudden urge to start up an *Amazing Engine* campaign, or a friendly game of *Talisman*, or a couple rounds of *Arcadia: The Wyld Hunt*, you could.

Yes, it's sad when a game line ends. Usually it's most sad when the existing products don't live up to the line's overall potential. A company might promise a five-year plan for its game world, only to disappear after two supplements. Or a

game line might end right before the supplement that promises to fix Broken Rule X comes out. But for games that have had a long, healthy life, there's no reason to be upset just because the new products aren't coming out. View it as an opportunity.

If you don't like the current super-hero games based on the DC or Marvel universes, there are previous incarnations of the game to choose from. If you loved the old cardboard miniatures that came with the TSR *Indiana Jones* game, there's nothing to say you can't use them in *Masterbook Indiana Jones* or *GURPS Cliffhangers*. If you wanted to play a psionic spacefaring time-travelling Ninja trapped in *Ravenloft*, by gum, you could. . . even though 2nd Edition *AD&D* material will soon be a thing of the past.

I'll be honest. I like cancelled lines. I think it appeals to the collector in me; I know that, once I start hoarding, say, *Ghostbusters* material, I can collect it all without worry of a new supplement coming out to make my collection incomplete. I know I can come up with a completely different *Wraith* game, without fear of new material coming out to contradict me. I can be confident in my ability to start up a *Torg* campaign without anything to worry about.

Um. . .

Anyway, for those of you who are fans of a game that has recently been cancelled, or gone awry from your vision of the game world, or had its output dramatically scaled back, I'd urge you to remember: They can't come into your house and take your games. Whatever you enjoyed about the game books that were released for your game, you can still enjoy. I'm glad I live in an information age, where fans of games like *DC Heroes* and *Talisman* continue to chat and provide new insight, material, and rules, and where its easier than ever to buy old out-of-print books. I'm grateful to companies, like Wizards of the Coast and FASA, who provide material on their websites for free that won't be published conventionally.

But mostly I'm excited about the *Alternity* campaign I'm sure I'm going to start up in a few years.

* * *

Some Random Thoughts:

- For those of you submitting articles, **please** include all relevent information every time you submit: Name, Address, Social Security number (if you're in the states), and how you'd like to be paid. I do not have a master list of Everyone Who Has Ever Written For Pyramid, and you're only going to delay your loot if I can't find that information. If you're in another country and have a W8 on file with Steve Jackson Games, telling me that will save some time, too.
- If you want to submit a review, I'd strongly encourage you to look over previously accepted reviews. Read them carefully, and note the "style" of a review. Feel free to modify this style if you want, but after writing it, ask yourself: "Are there any questions I would have about the product if I hadn't read the book and written the review?" Avoid "Pros / Cons" lists at the end; a proper conclusion with the same information works better for me.
- If at all possible, please don't include attachments with your e-mail; just paste your article directly to your e-mail below the relevant information.
- If you're submitting a Supporting Cast article, please make sure it's similar in format to those previously published. In other words, include point costs and totals for *GURPS* characters, make sure your *Brave New World* character looks like published *Brave New World* characters, etc.
- Never drink paint, no matter how much it looks like a milkshake. (Not really relevant, but solid advice nonetheless.)
- As ever, feel free to write me at pyramid@sjgames.com.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **GURPS Time Travel**, p. 15*

(Four stars) "he is ettemping to push a parsel intoo her lap, but she calls him a uncleen part of the anatummy and clocks him with it (the parsell), cuvvaring halv his hed in pyure graid sillchawkuh!"

Billy "Head Shot" McGann

by P.D. Magnus

Art by Art Today and Phil Reed

ST: 10
DX: 11 [10]
IQ: 12 [20]
HT: 10
Speed: 5.25
Move: 5
Dodge: 5

Advantages: Acute Vision +2 [4]

Disadvantages: Mistaken Identity [-5]; One Eye [-15]; Unluckiness [-10]

Skills: Acting-11 [1]; Artist-11 [2]; Bard-11 [1]; Brawling-10 [1/2]; Computer Operation-12 [1]; Criminology-10 [1/2]; Driving-11 [2]; Forensics-11 [2]; Guns-13 [4]; Law-11 [2]; Photography-15 [8]

Total Points: 25 points

Billy McGann grew up wanting to be a police officer like his father and grandfather. Always interested in science and art, when he did end up on the force it was as a forensic specialist and crime scene photographer. After only a few months on the job, he reported to the scene of a multiple homicide. The officers thought the area was secure, but the killer was still there hiding among the carnage. When Billy unwittingly disturbed his hiding place, the murderer attacked and clawed out one of Billy's eyes.

Although there were expensive operations that might have saved Billy's eye if they had been performed immediately, the police health insurance wouldn't cover them. In fact, Billy was nearly reprimanded for his poor handling of the situation. He quit the force in disgust.

He found a job as a photojournalist and was good enough that some of his photos are quite well known, the kind that anyone who reads the newspaper probably noticed. An unfavorable contract meant that his name rarely appeared with his photos, however, and when Billy tried to break the contract he found himself out of a job.

To pay the bills, Billy turned to studio photography: 8x10 head shots of smiling teens and that sort of thing. This kind of slumming earned him the moniker "Head Shot" among his artist friends. Billy had been making a good if dull living until his most recent troubles. First he noticed that someone was following him; then someone had been through his files at

Supporting Cast: Billy "Head Shot" McGann

work. When his studio burned down in a suspicious fire, Billy told the police about the man who had been following him. They wrote off his suspicions as paranoia. When Billy was driving home, someone tried to run him off the road. He knew he had to do something, so he asked around about hiring a bodyguard. That's when things got really bad.

Years ago, there was a one-eyed bounty hunter named BD McGann who was given the nickname "Head Shot" because he had a habit of shooting people between the eyes. He is no relation of Billy's. It's just a strange coincidence. Head Shot McGann the bounty hunter had a reputation as skilled and reliable, but it's an old reputation. Nevertheless, some people suspect he's still around, even if they haven't heard of his recent exploits. So when Head Shot McGann started asking around about attempts on the life of some photographer, the people who knew his reputation took notice.

It didn't take Billy too long to figure out that there had been a mix up, but he's had trouble convincing anyone that he's not the bounty hunter. He was approached by a young gun wanting to show that she could outdraw the infamous Head Shot; Billy only talked her down by bluff and intimidation. This episode convinced him that he has no chance as a photographer, but so long as everyone thinks he's a bounty hunter they will give him wide berth. Still, he knows his luck won't hold forever.

The obvious way to get PCs involved is to have Billy look to them for help. If they are a typical group of PCs, they are more likely to have heard of the bounty hunter McGann than the studio photographer McGann. However, it's possible they know Billy from his days on the force, or know of his work as a photojournalist. What happens next will depend on who searched and then set fire to Billy's office. There are several possibilities:

- Billy took a photograph that someone wants suppressed. Someone who is widely thought to be dead sat for a portrait, and their protectors thought better of leaving evidence like that behind. Billy had absent-mindedly used the negative as a bookmark and then took the book home with him. When the protectors searched his files, they found that several of the pictures were missing. They burned his office in case he had hidden it somewhere there, but they're still watching.
- BD McGann is active again and has earned the wrath of a criminal syndicate. The gang bosses ordered him dealt with, but there was a failure of communication and the toughs sent to do the job believed they were supposed to deal with Billy.
- Billy's years of hard luck are getting to him. He really is paranoid. There never was anyone following him, the fire was just an accident, and he didn't need a bodyguard before the case of mistaken identity. This might be carried even further: Not only was he never followed, but no one seriously thinks he is a bounty hunter either. The incident with a "young gun" was just a misunderstanding. This doesn't hold out the promise of much adventure, but it might make for either a smoke screen to conceal the real plot or a hook to get the PC's involved in something else.
- For the last year, Billy's monthly credit card bill has totaled to a palindromic prime number. This is just another coincidence, but the Knights Templar suspect him of carefully selecting these numbers in order to send secret messages to agents at his bank. When they learn about BD McGann, they will conclude that Billy really is the bounty hunter and that he went undercover as part of some complicated scheme.
- It's also possible that the PC's were sent to follow Billy and suppress a photograph he had taken. This becomes more complicated as criminals of all variety start to return favors they owe to the bounty hunter McGann.

Deus ex Machina Tempus

(God from the Time Machine)

"And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer."
-- Revelation 10:5-6

In the End Times, says St. John, time shall be no more, and all God's works shall be revealed. He doesn't specifically say that they'll be revealed to a musicologist priest in Venice, of course, but then he had a lot of ground to cover. Unlike the prophet of Patmos, however, we have more time to cover time, from 1952 to the Crucifixion and back again, chasing demons, conspiracies, and Deadly Mirror Entities all the while. And since all this makes great campaign fodder, let me urge you to take time for Father Ernetti. After all, he took time for you.

"'Every human being,' declares Father Ernetti, 'traces from birth to death a double furrow of light and sound. This constitutes his individual identity mark. The same applies to an event, to music, to movement. The antennae used on our laboratory enable us to "tune in" on these furrows: picture and sound' Physicists will perhaps be unconvinced by such theories, but it is an undeniable fact that Father Ernetti can show 'photographs' of the distant past, and play back voices that have been silent for millennia."
-- Robert Charroux, *The Mysterious Past*

It all began with Gregorian chants. In 1952, Father Pellegrino Ernetti, a 27-year old Benedictine priest, labored to remove stray harmonics from recordings of Gregorian chants. As Peter Krassa tells the story in *Father Ernetti's Chronovisor*, Ernetti accidentally recorded the voice of his co-worker's dead father, seemingly sent from the afterlife. Ernetti, a student of ancient music theory, speculated that the classical Pythagorean and Aristotelian notions, that sound and harmonies never actually cease to exist, explained the voice. He had somehow recorded a voice from the past! Working on the project for the next five years with an increasingly high-powered team of Catholic physicists (including Enrico Fermi and a mysterious Portuguese Professor de Matos), Ernetti slowly developed an apparatus that could focus on any harmonic of light and sound from any time in the past -- his "chronovisor."

The chronovisor combined trimetallic antennae capable of receiving all harmonic vibrations, a tuner/direction finder device similar to an oscilloscope, and recording equipment. Father Ernetti's team tested the apparatus by watching speeches by Mussolini and Napoleon, then skipped backward through Roman history to a vegetable market under Trajan and the fall of Catiline. At one point, they watched the performance of a lost play, Quintus Ennius' *Thyestes,* at its Roman debut in 169 B.C. Ernetti copied the play, and made plans to seek out other lost artworks. And then the group searched for Jesus Christ. And they found Him (in 36 A.D.), and filmed the Last Supper, the Passion and Crucifixion -- and the Resurrection. In 1958, Father Ernetti showed the film to Pope Pius XII along with top Cardinals, the President of Italy, and key members of the Pontifical Academy. For the next decade or so, hints dribbled out of Venice about Father Ernetti's chronovisor -- Ernetti even spoke to a parapsychological congress on the topic in 1966. Tabloid reporters and curious fellow priests alike heard alternately that the chronovisor had been dismantled as unsafe (or too dangerous to publicize) and that it had been used to make archaeological discoveries, translate the original Ten Commandments, or record the lectures of Pythagoras. At some point, however -- roughly coinciding with the sudden death of Pope John Paul I -- Father Ernetti stopped cooperating. He returned to musicology, and died in 1994, six months after making a final report to Pope John Paul II.

"[Steinmetz] drew the plans for that camera and we followed through and today we can say definitely that we can go into the past and pick up every past event. Of course, that becomes too cumbersome, but we select past events, and as I said, the scientists are admitting today and fully believing that we will go into the past events to the extent of a million years . . ."
-- Baird T. Spalding, *Life and Teaching of the Masters of the Far East* (Vol. 5)

But Father Ernetti was hardly the only pioneer in the exciting field of temporal photography. Even discounting the "spirit photography" of William Mumler, there's the instructive example of Baird T. Spalding, who made a considerable amount of money (most of it, admittedly, for his unscrupulous publisher-manager Douglas DeVorss) recapping the Wisdom of the East for small-town Americans. Spalding, who claimed to have spent much of his childhood in Inner Asia finding golden books and speaking with "elder brothers" from Shambhala, also told the story of building a time camera from plans drawn up by famed (and conveniently demised) electrical pioneer Charles Steinmetz. Spalding's "group" of 26 men (a double coven, I note idly) worked in Central Asia and made movies of George Washington's inauguration and of the Sermon on the Mount between 1914 and 1953. (The relatively unimaginative Oxford engineer George Delawar used his 1950 time camera to take pictures of his own wedding.) However, when DeVorss was gunned down (by an assassin suffering from memory loss) six months after Spalding's death, any leads to the Time Camera vanished.

"After a moment he asked, 'What about the Resurrection? Did you witness that as well?' 'Yes.' the Venetian priest replied emphatically. 'And it is very difficult to describe. We saw it in silhouette, as if it were a shape seen through a thin film of illuminated alabaster -- as if we were seeing it through a crystal.'"
-- Frs. Francois Brune and Pellegrino Ernetti, in *Father Ernetti's Chronovisor,* by Peter Krassa

In the old days, of course, if you claimed to see historical events "through a crystal," you were practicing skrying, or catoptromancy -- mirror magic. We've already covered much of that freakiness in a previous column, but it's interesting to recall the vital role played by Venice in both the history of mirror science and in the career of Father Ernetti. Familiarity with mirrors, of course, is akin to familiarity with sound, both optics and acoustics dealing with ratios, frequencies, and similar elements. Father Ernetti's insistence on the "scientific" basis of his chronovisor turns out to draw heavily on Pythagorean mysticism -- the music of the spheres, and the permanence of the transmigrated soul as an "astral record" in the universe. (Pythagoras, according to Pausanias, possessed a magic mirror of his own.) What Father Ernetti called the astral record, the Theosophists who followed Spalding would call the "Akashic Record," the complete story of everything and everybody in the history of the world, accessible only to those adepts who have opened their mystical eye. Hmmm. Krassa explicitly ties the mystical sight of the Akashic Record to the mystical (and one-eyed) Lemurians, who still exist as thought-forms hanging in the immutable ether. Krassa even hints darkly that Father Ernetti's other claim to fame may have come from his close association with astral entities -- the good father was also one of Italy's foremost exorcists. One wonders if, in his time-viewing, Father Ernetti might not have stumbled upon the Lovecraftian "Hounds of Tindalos," who pursue those who see them throughout time and can only be stopped by carefully measured curved lines. Like, say, those in a lens.

"Yes, the chronovisor would turn the world topsy-turvy, as you say -- but in ways that would strike fear into the hearts of certain groups of people."
-- Fr. Pellegrino Ernetti, in *Father Ernetti's Chronovisor,* by Peter Krassa

So, let us take leave even of the thin and tattered facts of Father Ernetti's career, and propose a super combo ***GURPS Time Travel-Voodoo*** campaign frame. Father Ernetti gains the crucial hint in his researches from Enrico Fermi just before Fermi's death in 1954. (The same year as Spalding and DeVorss. Hmmm.) He develops the chronovisor, shows it to Pope Pius XII, and is made the General of a new, secret society within the Church -- the Order of St. Eligius (patron of clockmakers). The Order uses the chronovisor first to chart history, and after improving the apparatus to project themselves back in time, battling demons, astral and akashic entities, and threats to the Vatican. (Perhaps they used the chronovisor to read over Tesla's shoulder -- or Steinmetz'.) It's likely that the Observer Effect holds (with concomitant Highly Obvious Inertia), although much can escape in the blurred visions of the past. (If I were running the game, I'd force Eligian elites projecting back in time to have an artifact from the place and time they aimed to visit -- the Vatican's storehouse of relics and manuscripts would come in handy here.) The Eligian library, deep within the bowels of the Giorgio Cini Foundation at the abbey of San Giorgio Maggiore in Venice, holds copied secret documents from all of time -- the magics of Pythagoras and Roger Bacon, the secrets of the KGB and CIA, the numbered accounts of crimelords and dictators. The Order uses this knowledge to make pinpoint strikes into history, using Father Ernetti's powerful harmonic exorcism techniques to drive off the demonic In-Betweeners and their malevolent Lemurian masters.

"All this gives rise to serious questions. What was going on in Geneva during the last few centuries? What was the

power and the technology behind the clock makers, also the seat of world finance? And what was the symbology of creatures popping out of clocks? Could all this mean to suggest that those who control the finances of the world also control and manipulate the consciousness of time?"
-- Preston Nichols and Peter Moon, *Montauk Revisited*

And, of course, to battle the other time conspiracies. Where did Fermi get the secrets of time travel in the first place? Why, from Project Rainbow -- better known as the [Philadelphia Experiment](#). The Rainbow team, now located at Montauk, Long Island under the direction of shadowy forces within the U.S. government and scientific elite, may have been the ones who silenced Fermi, Spalding, and DeVorss. Though not before the Spalding-Steinmetz camera fell into the hands of the Nine Unknown Seers of Shangri-La, who use it to access the Akashic Records directly in an ambitious plan to bring Lemuria once more into phase with the Earth and create a Golden Paradise in Tibet. Unless, of course, the British royal family can stop them -- everybody knows that where you've got a Vatican conspiracy there is an equal and opposite British conspiracy. Using John Dee's shewstone and the Delawar Time Projector (as well as the vast resources of the British Museum), the secretive MI-ƒ teams seek to preserve Western power in Asia and restore Cecil Rhodes' "Great Work of Time." Thus we have a four-way conspiracy campaign of intrigue and time travel, in which anyone (or no one) can be the good guys. (We just don't have space to do justice to Marc Davenport's theory, in *Visitors From Time: The Secret of the UFOs,* that UFOs are time machines. Perhaps in another column.) Or they can all struggle heroically against the Mirror-Venusians from our Battling the Mirror Realm campaign frame I mentioned in that earlier column -- look [back in time](#) and decide for yourself.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by Nick LaLone

Gary Gygax, co-creator of *Dungeons & Dragons* (among other accomplishments), is a legendary figure in the RPG industry. Or perhaps that should be lejendary? Regardless, recently the ever-gracious Gygax took time out of his busy schedule to chat with Pyramid.

* * *

Pyramid: Most of us know who you are and what you have done but for the record, give us your name and gaming credits?

Gary Gygax: Greetings! Gary Gygax here.

I have been active in hobby gaming since the 1960s. I founded the Gencon convention, co-founded TSR in 1973.

While I have done a fair number of board games and military miniatures rules sets, I am best known for co-creating the *Duneons and Dragons* game and authoring the original *AD&D RPG*. I have also authored or co-authored a few other RPGs, *Mythus* being among the more notable. Finally, I have written ten game-based fantasy novels, and a couple of "how to" books as well.

Way back in the mid-1980s I was co-producer of the *Dungeons and Dragons* Cartoon Show, too.

That covers it well enough...

Pyramid: What have you been up to lately?

Gary Gygax: About four years ago I began writing what is now the *Lejendary Adventure RPG* system. Hekaforge Productions is currently launching the three core books in that system, and I am now working with freelance designers who are busy creating support material for the game.

But that's not all!

Last July I signed a contract with Wizards of the Coast to do a considerable amount of creative work for them. While the "Up on a Soapbox" column in *Dragon Magazine* is the only currently "visible" result to that, I am also engaged in various other efforts in this regard. While some of this work will likely not be published per se, I hope it will contribute to the excellence of the Third Edition of the *Dungeons and Dragons* Game. Later on, something else is likely, but I can't discuss that now, and it is a couple of years down the pike.

Pyramid: How does it feel to be writing for Dragon Magazine *again?*

Gary Gygax: Simply put, great! It is an honor to be back, and I enjoy writing very much. . . . Obviously.

Pyramid: How do you feel about **Advanced Dungeons and Dragons Third Edition***?*

Gary Gygax: While I can't go into details, I must say that I am very impressed. The *PHB* is extensive in its information--and packed with new material. The *DMG* is something I believe to be a *must* for all Game Masters regardless of the system they employ! I haven't reviewed the whole of the *MM* yet, but the entries I have seen are excellent.

In all, I am convinced that 3E is going to be a great success.

Pyramid: Did you have the chance to lend anything to the creation of **Advanced Dungeons and Dragons: 3rd edition***?*

Gary Gygax: Consultation, advice, and commentary in the main. As much as I hate to admit it, the designers have done a great job without me having a lot of creative input. On the positive side, hey! That surely is good for gaming. :)

Pyramid: Dungeons and Dragons *is going to hit the big screen after nine long years. How do you feel about it?*

Gary Gygax: Well, there's a poser. The production entity involved is not renowned for its past motion picture excellence, shall we say. On the other hand, from what I have heard, they are really doing a lot to make the *D&D* game-based film something above and beyond past movies they have done. Of course I am very much hoping that the film will be great, a box office hit that not only gamers but a lot of movie-goers love. (We all know what the "critics" are likely to say. . .) This will be a great boost not merely for the *D&D* game but for fantasy in general.

Let's all hope for the *D&D* film to be a success, but remember that the Tolkein movie is also out there, and it has the budget that the *D&D* production *should* have had.

Pyramid: What do you think about Hasbro's acquisition of your old company TSR?

Gary Gygax: I'd heard about the possibility of Hasbro acquiring Wizards, and thus TSR, back in early June of last year. I was really surprised when the deal went through, as I had thought with the success of the *Pokemon CCG* that Wizard's would remain independent and go public.

While I was a little nervous at first, it seems that Hasbro has it right. With Peter Adkison under contract as CEO of Wizards for five years, and clearly Peter is doing a superb job there, it's clear that Hasbro is savvy, won't be "messing up" the hobby gaming end of things.

What is very positive in all this is the added capacity that Wizards now has to reach into the mass market to promote hobby gaming. I believe that we will see an increase in the audience for our sort of games because of the acquisition. Thus, in all, it seems a good thing.

Pyramid: How does it feel to be partly responsible for the creation of an industry?

Gary Gygax: Very satisfying, of course, to know that so many people have had so much fun and enjoyment -- even better careers and all -- because of my efforts. It is something I am proud of. . . not to mention that because I still love creating and playing games I'm damned happy I did so that I can keep on earning a living thus. :)

Pyramid: You've been in this industry since the beginning, how has it changed?

Gary Gygax: When Tactical Studies Rules (TSR) published the *D&D* game in January 1974, nobody had heard of role-playing. The bigger audiences for hobby games were boardgamers (maybe 50,000 total), and the secondary one was military miniatures (perhaps 10,000 players here in the US). There were no "specialty" dice manufacturers either. It was a real selling job to get distributors to pick up the game. Retail outlets for hobby games were few and far

between.

In the years since then the whole picture has changed. Now it isn't a matter of whether or not RPGs are viable as a game form, not a mere fad. Rather, it is what *new* RPG/RPG form is going to crack the market.

LARPing is here, and it is good!

Computer RPGs outsell paper ones.

Online RPG play certainly has more participants than do in-person games.

Today we have a mature industry, one that has had 25 years to reach where it has now. The changes are astonishing.

Pyramid: Many think that the gaming industry is dying. Do you think this is true?

Gary Gygax: Dying? To the contrary, it has never been healthier! It has been observed that the paper game market is overcrowded, but that will take care of itself. Meantime, interest in RPGs, after flagging for a time, is again on the rise.

Although some decry the *Magic: The Gathering CCG*, for it did impact RPG sales for awhile, I hold that the new game form was a boon to gaming. It greatly increased the number of gamers, and MtG has pretty well established itself as a "classic" not too. CCGers are gamers, after all. Furthermore, it seems evident that some percentage of them are now investigating RPGs.

With the phenomenal success of the *Pokemon CCG*, things are even better. I predict that there will be a progression of play from there to *MtG* to RPGs--actually mainly to the *3E D&D* game, naturally. Still, *all* RPGing began with the *D&D* game. That didn't prevent a whole host of competing publishers to develop. The same will prove true about the growth of participants I foresee. CCGers who begin role-playing with the *3E D&D* game will not necessarily stay with it. The whole industry will definitely benefit from the efforts of Wizards, although it will be a gradual process.

Actually, any "loss" likely to be experienced now will be gamers moving to CRPGs. However, I believe this will be negligible at worst. Who says that computer role-playing fans can't be gained by paper publishers through aggressive marketing? CRPGs also lead to online gaming participation. This, in turn, encourages participants to pick up paper games.

The market share for RPGs is surely largest in the CRPG field, although Internet gaming is likely to take over first position fairly soon. So what? The whole of the audience for RPGs is *increasing*, and that means that the game form is alive, well, and highly viable.

Pyramid: Many people view Fantasy as a genre that has been, to say the least, completed. Do you think there is anything fresh that can be done with fantasy?

Gary Gygax: I will not take the opportunity presented here to attempt a plug for my own new FRPG. What I will say is this:

Fantasy has been the most popular genre for RPG play since 1974. There have been more FRPGs published than all other genres put together. Is there nothing-new possible for it? Sure. I just can't say exactly what it will be. With the creativity of gamers in mind, though, I believe that there will be innovations yet to come in paper RPGs. The main place to look for fresh presentation though is on the computer.

Pyramid: On your homepage, you have some very interesting chess variants ([X-Factor](#) and [Dragon Chess](#)). Are you ever going to publish them for distribution?

Gary Gygax: Thanks! I appreciate your kind words regarding the chess variants. Because I love games (chess being a great favorite of mine) whenever the creative muse strikes, I design regardless of the commercial potential for the work at hand. (You should see some of the computer game premises and designs I have kicking around on the hard drive.)

To answer the question though, not likely. Pretty slim chance for getting chess variants published, so I haven't even attempted to find a publisher. Mainly I wanted to share the games with fellow buffs.

Pyramid: I see on your site, [The Creative World of Gary Gygax](#), that you have created a new company called Hekaforge productions. What is Hekaforge working on now?

Gary Gygax: Hekaforge Productions is doing one thing, and one thing only. It is publishing the ***Lejendary Adventure RPG*** system. As of now, there are about a dozen game products lined up. By the time this interview hits, all three of the core books for the system will likely be in general distribution: the ***Lejendary Rules***, the ***Lejend Master's Lore***, and the ***Beasts of Lejend***books. Following them, not in this particular order, we have a world setting book, three sourcebooks, four adventures, a GM screen, and some "suitable for use with" adventures slated.

There are a number of freelance designers working on more sourcebooks and adventures, so we expect to keep the pipeline filled with support material.

Also, there is one new genre addition, the ***Lejendary Asterogues Fantastical Science RPG*** now in beta-test form, a sourcebook/adventure platform for it working, and a couple of other genre additions being written by freelancers. We plan to make the ***LA RPG*** a large and multi-genered one.

Pyramid: What makes the **Lejendary Adventures** *stand out from the rest of the fantasy based games out there?*

Gary Gygax: While I would much prefer to have someone else answer this question, I will take a fast pass at it.

First, the ***LA RPG*** is based on skills, not a character class. The rules, including those for skill use, are "light," and allow the Lejend Master, and players, a lot of room for doing things "right" -- the way *they* want to role-play.

Second, the scope for character creation, the ***LA*** game "Avatar", is tremendous. The player can craft just about any sort of heroic (or other) sort of character desired, build in background material so as to make role-playing that Avatar suit the campaign. Getting into play, creating the Avatar, adventuring with a viable character from the first, is not a major effort. Developing the nature and details of the player's game persona can be as extensive as desired. Likewise, making that character into the sort the player has always hoped for is a matter of extensive interaction with the campaign environment. While the Avatar is pretty able to begin with, attaining a really potent character in the LA game is a matter of years and years of clever play.

Third, the system itself is broad and flexible. It can accommodate just about any style of play without strain. Likewise, it lends itself to both addition and expansion.

Fourth, it is already well developed in its content, and it will continue to be extensively supported, including not only paper material but online with a website, ezine, etc.

Pyramid: Will **Lejendary Adventures** *or* **Lejendary Earth** *be branching out into other gaming devices? For example CCG's,* **Diskwars***, and/or miniatures?*

Gary Gygax: At this time we are not contemplating any such spin-off game material as you cite. Hekaforge is open to proposals, though. As a matter of fact, we do have a couple of online gaming licenses now -- [Macray's Keep](#) for text-based ***LA*** gaming, and RPG Realms for play of the ***Lejendary Asterogues RPG***.

Miniatures would be a nice compliment to the RPG, and with them we would likely then develop a special set of rules for tabletop play. So likely as things progress we will.

Pyramid: Your **[Elder Worlds](#)** *game is available in full online. How do you feel about the online distribution of Role-playing games?*

Gary Gygax: The *[Elder Worlds RPG](#)* as it stands isn't really what it will be. Fact is that I like the environment, but not the current rules. So that is one of the genre expansion projects I mentioned above. Someone is currently at work

adapting the setting to the *LA* game rules, altering things a bit so as to fit the whole.

The small size of the audience for paper RPGs, and the plethora of products now in stores, has forced new RPG publishers to attempt to sell their products online. While I have no problems with the concept, it isn't likely to be much help, for it doesn't address the actual problem. There aren't sufficient customers for all the RPGs already available, and putting product up for sale online isn't going to change that.

Going back to an earlier question, this is the good thing about Hasbro, Wizards, and the *3E D&D* game. There is where there is the best chance for enlarging the overall market for paper RPGs.

Pyramid: Will the gaming store ever die? If so, why?

Gary Gygax: Simply put, no, I think not. There is nothing like going into a shop and actually holding and examining a game product. There is also the general social aspect of visiting the game store. The successful ones encourage socialization, and game play right there, of course.

Consider the success of the Games Workshop outlets, and the fact that Wizards is creating a chain of their own shops. We'll have game shops for a long time to come. :)

Pyramid: Will computers eventually replace dice?

Gary Gygax: Again, I think not.

Pyramid: Oh? And why is that?

To remove the act of holding-shaking-tossing the dice from the player, giving it to a machine, is the antithesis of in-person RPG activity. The GM might wish to use a "dice-bot" for generating random numbers, but not the players. The act of dice rolling is too much a part of the game -- akin to surrogate weapon use, spell casting, etc.

Pyramid: Do you still DM?

Gary Gygax: Of course I still Game Master!

Pyramid: What games do you run?

Gary Gygax: For the past four years I have been the Lejend Master for my *LA* game campaign--with some side excursions to DM original *AD&D*, and even "old time" *D&D* as played with the initial three booklets.

Pyramid: What is your favorite trick or event that has occurred to you throughout the years?

Gary Gygax: My favorite trick remains the fun we had with my son Ernie, then playing Tenser, as I recall. When he wanted to see what a giant had in his bag. (This tale was written up long ago in the *Dragon Magazine*.)

However, of late I had a lot of fun with a group of kobolds inhabiting the uppermost level of my revitalized original Greyhawk Castle dungeons. In play at conventions, teams of adventurers have been able to return to the old setting, and therein a great number of them have come to grief in confronting this kobold band. Originally, some really excellent die rolling -- bad on the part or the players, good on mine (done in the open!) -- enabled the humanoids to defeat a party of nine 2nd level PCs despite having about half of their number knocked over by a Sleep spell at the onset. After several other victories, this kobold group now dresses in blue leather armor, sports brass eagle gorgets, and wears tall bearskin hats. Their continues victories have gained them +1 on their HD, +1 to hit and on damage, and their morale is unshakable. With a leader that is equal to a bugbear, and a couple of assistants of hobgoblin-like ability, they are now virtual masters of the level. If a few more adventurer parties fall to them, I think they might become a force to be reckoned with beyond that. . .

Pyramid: Any advice for those writers or designers who want to get published?

Gary Gygax: Heh! I do professional consulting, and you ask me that? Well, okay, a couple of tips. Look into computer game design if you really expect to succeed. There's greater chance there than doing paper RPGs. If you are bent on paper game design, then count on having to start your own company to get the work published. In all, there are too few gamers, too many RPG systems, so chances for success are slim indeed.

The best bet in paper game design is creating support for an existing and well-established game system. To get to do that, you need to be known -- which means writing and having your material published in a top magazine or ezine (such as *Pyramid*, for instance. :)

Good luck!

by John Dallman

Art by Donna Bar and Colorized by Alex Fernandez

"Hit!"
"Parried."
"Hit!"
"Parried."
. . .
"Hit. . ."
"Parried. . ."

Playing out swashbuckling combat under *GURPS* can be rather slow: high active defenses, provided by Fencing or martial arts, mean that most attacks get stopped. A small extension to the Feint maneuver helps with this.

Alphonse and Bertram both have, say, Fencing-18, Combat Reflexes (+1 defense), basket hilts on their weapons (+1 defense) and PD3. This gives them parries of 17. They're skillful, but not inhuman; their combat will be extremely boring to play through.

Simply feinting doesn't do too much good: the defender is most unlikely to blow his fencing roll, and the 3D6 bell-curve means that the attacker is unlikely to make his roll more than about three points better than the defender. If, say, Alphonse rolls 10 and Bertram rolls 13, then Bertram's parry is down to 14 against the next attack. This makes very little difference to his actual chance of making the roll; the combat will still take ages.

A good way to deal with this is to extend the Feint maneuver, and feint again: we called this "stacked feint" when it was developed for an abortive *GURPS 9 Princes in Amber* campaign.

Take the case above, where Alphonse has three points of advantage on Bertram. He could make a real attack and subtract those three points from Bertram's active defense -- but that option doesn't work well.

To make a stacked feint, Alphonse feints again. Those three points of advantage get subtracted from Bertram's skill: Alphonse rolls against his Fencing- 18, while Bertram rolls against 15 (Fencing-18 minus the three-point disadvantage).

Say Alphonse rolls another 10, and Bertram rolls an 11. The attacker has made his roll by 8; the defender has made his roll by 4. Alphonse now has four points of advantage on Bertram.

Of course, if Alphonse had rolled a 16, making his effective skill roll by 2, and Bertram had got slightly luckier, and made his skill roll by more than that (say, rolled an 12 against his effective 15, making it by three), then Alphonse has lost the advantage he got from the first feint. But, most of the time, his advantage will improve.

An attacker is allowed to keep on building up a feint for as long as he likes. Some playtesting -- which became a game in its own right for a few evenings -- demonstrated that it was a good idea to get a skilled opponent's defense down to 7 or so before going for the kill. At this point, using Hit Location and going for a serious wound was a sound tactic. If your opponent survives a real attempt at a hit, you need to start building up that bonus again.

Bertram doesn't go to his doom in ignorance. He gets a chance (roll vs. best of IQ, Body Language, or the combat skill his opponent is using for the Feints) to realize that a stacked feint penalty is building up on him.

To get out of the stacked feint, Bertram needs to break off combat: the classical method is to use a Retreat option on your defense, preferably with a graceful step or jump backwards. Getting into close combat also works, as does scoring damage on Alphonse or anything else that interrupts his concentration.

Interestingly, RPG combat systems don't tend to encourage characters to move about nearly as much as real people fighting with swords do; giving characters a reason to move about makes things look better, and lets you herd an opponent about.

Of course, both participants in a combat can use this rule at the same time. For playability, ignore any interactions between the two accumulating feint bonuses. Leaving it to the characters to decide if they want to Retreat from the advantage their opponent had -- blowing their own advantage -- works well. This can be a tricky decision when you have a fair advantage built up: higher Speed is a huge advantage when both defenses are getting low.

If you use this system, respect more skilful fighters. Using stacked feint in quite a few trial combats, we found that one level of skill more than your opponent gave victory about two-thirds of the time, two more skill levels made it about 80%, and three levels was as sure as a combat system with criticals and fumbles lets it be.

En garde!

Forboldn

by Hans Rancke-Madsen

Art by Tom Peters and Colored by Alex Fernandez

For many centuries Forboldn was a neglected backwater where a few poor settlers battled climate, atmosphere and soil to make a living and barely managed to keep the population level steady. But today all that is changing thanks to massive Imperial aid. A huge terraforming project to change the atmosphere and climate is underway, and new settlers are bringing much-needed skills and muscle to the planet. Everybody agrees that Forboldn is finally going places. But not everybody are satisfied with the direction it is heading. . .

The following description details Forboldn in the year 1117. Events in the main *Traveller* universe and the *GURPS Traveller* universe have not yet diverged far enough to affect Forboldn, so the description is equally valid for both universes. A few notes at the end outlines how things will develop for the *Rebellion* and the *New Era*.

Physical Details

Forboldn is a non-industrial Imperial planet orbiting in the life zone around Ivush, a G0 V star with a mass of 1.04 and a stellar luminosity of 1.05. It is a large, molten-core planet with a diameter of 8,080 miles. The density is 6.05 grams per cubic centimeter (1.1 Earth's density), the mass is 1.16 Earth masses, and the gravity is 1.11 G. The rotation period is 26h 24m 00s and the orbital period is 724.88 days (668.1 local days). The atmosphere is a standard oxygen-nitrogen mix with a surface pressure of 2.11 tainted by high CO_2 concentrations. Hydrographic percentage is 26. The axial tilt is 27 degrees and the orbital eccentricity is nil. Base temperature is 106 degrees Fahrenheit (41 degrees Celsius) giving Forboldn a summer high of 156 degrees F (69 degrees C) at the equator and a winter low of -44 degrees F (-42 degrees C) at the poles. Native life is present.

Social Details

The high CO_2 content of the atmosphere has largely restricted development of Forboldn to the highlands where the concentration is low enough to be tolerable. Though filter masks allow humans to breathe in the lowlands, most people prefer to make their home where they can breathe without artificial aid. 80% of the population lives on the Wueldn Plateau, an area roughly the size of France located in the southern temperate zone, and on other, smaller, high-lying areas. The remaining 20% consists of people with a higher than normal tolerance for CO_2 who are able to survive at lower altitudes and are spread out across the rest of the planet. On Forboldn, where people for many generations have bred for this trait, it is much more common than usual and many Forboldians can survive CO_2 levels that would quickly kill a normal, baseline human. Though strictly speaking this tolerance is distributed evenly along a curve, for gaming purposes it is divided into three discrete levels. Most people will have at most one level of CO_2 tolerance (and that only rarely). Only people from Forboldn and planets with similar atmospheric conditions will have two and three levels.

The land surface of Forboldn is divided into four regions: The Highlands, where baseline humans can breathe comfortably; the Uplands; the Midlands; and the Lowlands at sea level. To breathe comfortably in the Uplands, 1 level of CO_2 tolerance is necessary, in the Midlands 2 levels are necessary, and in the Lowlands 3 are required. A yoga-like discipline akin to Breath Control allows an adept to breathe air one level above his tolerance level as long as he is conscious.

Forboldn's population is presently undergoing a rapid growth due to a large number of immigrants being ferried in from the Imperial core. The official figure was roughly 3 million as of 001-1117, but a large number of people living in the lowlands refuse to cooperate with the census and is not included in the figure. Estimates range from 100,000 to

half a million, with 200,000 being considered the most likely figure.

The planet is governed by an organization called the Forboldn Meliorative Society, LIC, a company in which most citizens have stock. The control rating is 3. The technology is mostly TL 5 except for the rapidly expanding city of Ashar located next to Forboldn Starport which is closer to TL 10 due to recent massive imports of equipment from Regina.

History

Forboldn was settled in two stages, in 83 by the Asharii, a group of exiles driven from Lishun during one of the Imperial pacification campaigns, and in 141 by the Gugurans, a group of utopians from Dagudashaag with a fake grant to the planet sold them by a swindler. The result was a smoldering brushfire war between the two groups that lasted for five generations. In 234 the Ashari government was recognized by the Emperor as the sole legitimate government of Forboldn and immediately petitioned to join the Imperium. In 250 Forboldn and six other planets in the Regina Cluster was formally admitted. With Imperial aid the so-called Endless War was formally ended in 286, but accidents and mismanagement combined to keep the settlers poor and their technology low. With the pressure of the Endless War removed, the two rival settlements spread out and degenerated into numerous squabbling villages unable to cooperate on anything. Many settlers moved to areas far from their former neighbors, thus spreading the sparse population out across much of the habitable land. The world government soon found it impossible to govern the widely dispersed population and, though never formally dissolved, ceased to function within decades. No Imperial noble was ever appointed for the planet.

Terra Incognita: Forboldn

Over the years the distinction between Ashari and Gugurans blurred and became overridden by a general dislike of anybody not belonging to whatever local community one belonged to. From time to time larger political units arose, usually by force of arms, but they never encompassed more than a fraction of the planet and seldom lasted for more than one or two generations.

In 987 the Ministry of Colonization decided to attempt to utilize the many hectares of prime land not in use on Forboldn. This, however, provoked the locals into reviving the colonial government that has lain crippled for centuries. If the locals could not agree on anything else, they could at least agree that they did not want any outsiders muscling in.

For many decades the situation remained deadlocked until the ministry in 1089 finally persuaded the locals to allow the formation of the Forboldn Meliorative Society, LIC, a company in which they all received stock. The lure was the sizable subsidies promised by the ministry. The cost was an agreement to let in more settlers.

The plan was to import 1 million new settlers from 1110 to 1120, each new settler receiving roughly the same amount of stock as the original 2.2 million inhabitants. With their skills the tech level and wealth of the planet would hopefully increase to the point where more new settlers could be attracted with less inducement. The Ministry of Colonization goal was a healthy TL 9-10 agricultural planet with around 10 million inhabitants.

In 1110, when the first batch of new settlers arrived, that plan was already going awry. Parts of the project were several years behind even before the 5th Frontier War caused them to come to a screeching halt. Unfortunately, the plan involved recruiting new settlers in the Imperial core and this part was not affected by the war; the settlers began arriving exactly according to schedule. But the infrastructure necessary to house them, feed them, and put them to work had not been built. It became necessary to divert project funds to buy supplies and ferry them to Forboldn. Worse, the local Colonial Office officials have decided to cover up the problem, so the Ministry of Colonization

believes everything is going fine and colonists keep coming. So far the Colonial Office has managed to keep most of the newcomers alive, but little progress has been made in making them self-sufficient.

Forlodn Meliorative Society, LIC

The corporation that governs Forboldn and controls the implementation of the Forboldn Project was formed in 1089 in cooperation between the population of Forboldn who contributed ownership of the planet and the Ministry of Colonization which contributed the capital. Stock ownership in the new company was: Original settlers: 51%; First wave of new settlers: 20%; Ministry of Colonization (for later distribution to more new settlers): 27%; Imperial Family: 2%.

There are 100 million shares in all. 51% of the stock was distributed to everyone registered by a census in 1090, a total of 2,166,114 for an average of 23.5 shares apiece. The shares were distributed by a formula that gave adults more and children less than the average number of shares. The new arrivals from 1110 onwards each received 20 shares regardless of age out of the Ministry's allotment. Due to some redistribution from sales and inheritances typical holdings today range from 10 to 60 shares.

A 12 man Board of Governors is elected every six years to run the company and Forboldn. Voting is public with each citizen having as many votes as he has shares. Shares belonging to minors are voted by their legal guardians. The most recent election was in 1113. Very few newcomers voted and the ministry refrained from using their 27%. All twelve current board members belong to the old settlers. Their efforts to govern has been generally ineffective in the face of recent setbacks, growing corruption, and increasingly radical opposition.

Other Power/Interest Groups

The Colonial Office

The Colonial Office is a Ministry of Colonization agency with branches organized on the subsector level to implement the policies of the ministry. Sir Louis Farlane, the Director of the Duchy of Regina branch, has high hopes that when the Emperor gets around to appointing a baron for Forboldn, something that he is expected to do soon, he will choose Sir Louis. If, that is, Sir Louis can manage to hide the problems that are plaguing the project from higher authority.

The office is dissatisfied with the level of cooperation it is receiving from the Board of Governors and has been trying to seize greater control of the project.

The Shareless

The 51% of stock was distributed to everyone registered by a census in 1090 and the new arrivals from 1110 onwards each received shares out of the Ministry's allotment. But no provision was made for the children born to the citizens since 1090. Some families have shared the stock with their new children and other children have inherited from deceased family members, but there is a large group of "angry young people" who feel cheated and are causing a lot of unrest.

The Outbackers

Another disenfranchised group, or rather, a large number of groups, are the outbackers. These are small isolated communities in remote, inaccessible areas, clannish and suspicious of strangers, whose favorite recreation is shooting tax collectors and census takers and feuding with their neighbors. Having refused to cooperate with the census of 1090, they did not receive any stock.

One group of outbackers that merit special mention is the Swampers. They live in the great jungle swamps south of the Neasnik Sea and can become very old thanks to their diet which includes a species of tree krakens whose liver has

anagathic properties. They marry late and have few children. They are excessively reclusive even by outbacker standards.

The Constabulary

A ranger-like patrol was established in 1096 with planetwide jurisdiction and is trying to tame the outback. Until recently corruption was as rife in the Constabulary as in any other branch of the administration, but the new commandant, Oongor Verngoldn, has fought a hard fight to clean up the organization.

Tree Kraken Poachers

Tree Krakens are a family of arboreal animals native to Forboldn. Different species can be found at all altitudes. Some of them have a liver-like organ with anagatic properties. For this reason they have all been hunted extensively over the centuries, and some species have become extinct. All Tree Krakens are now protected by Imperial edict. Tree Kraken poaching is a dangerous, but potentially very profitable, venture.

Algae project scientists and eco-guerillas

One very controversial part of the Forboldn Project involves seeding the oceans with super-photosynthesizing algae designed to remove the excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere. Some environmentalists claim that this will cause the extinction of millions of native species. Others go further and claim that the level of free oxygen in the atmosphere will become dangerously high and thus just replace one atmospheric taint with another. The powerful environmentalist organization The Pan-Galactic Friends of Life are lobbying the Emperor for a ban on the project. Meanwhile scientists are busy seeding the oceans and more extremist groups than the PGFL are trying to sabotage the project, so far with a considerable amount of success.

Future Developments

Rebellion

In the main Traveller universe, the Rebellion puts the final nail in the Forboldn Project's coffin. The last 300,000 of the original million settlers never arrive, and with the loss of the ministry subsidy the economy does not improve nearly as much as had been hoped for. There is some slight improvement, however, and despite difficulties the company does survive.

New Era

Eventually the Regency's new Ministry of the Interior takes over the MoC and Imperial Family stock, most of which is distributed to refugees from other Imperial planets who are resettled on Forboldn - incidentally causing a blurring of the division between the first two groups of settlers. In addition, some of the original stock is sold to wealthy refugees. The population increases to 4.5 million in 1200, including 1.25 million refugees from Imperial worlds. In the next two years almost 1.5 million refugee Zhodani arrives. In 1202 stock ownership of the company is: Original and 'new' settlers: 65%; Imperial refugees: 33%; Ministry of the Interior: 2%.

GURPS Traveller

In the *GURPS Traveller* universe the Colonial Office stages a coup in 1119. They use their 27% of the stock to elect a puppet board whose first act is to ask the Colonial Office to step in and take over the reins of government. Resentment among the old settlers runs high, but at first the moderates prevail; except for a few individual acts of violence, reactions are mostly confined to sending a complaint to the ministry. The whole planet is a powder keg, however, and if something does not happen to relieve the tension, a civil war is imminent. Meanwhile, the Colonial Office continues

to issue cheerful progress reports.

Adventure Seeds

- Recently a bomb exploded aboard Algae Seed Station Four, a huge platform floating in the northern part of the Neasnik Sea near the equator; fortunately without doing too much harm. The Evolutionary Protection Army claimed responsibility for the deed. The EPA is a radical environmentalist group which oppose any interference with what they call "natural evolution." They have been known to bomb desert reforestation projects and rainforest logging operations at the same time. Dr. Flora McKenzie, the manager of the station, expects further attempts to sink the platform and is looking for a group of people to beef up security. The job will be complicated by scientists who resent any precautions that interfere with their work, a turf war with the old security guards who are sensitive about their failure to prevent the outrage and suspicions that one of them helped the EPAs, and the necessity of wearing protective suits against the heat and the CO_2.
- The PCs are contacted in a roundabout fashion by Oongor Verngoldn, the Commandant of the Forboldn Constabulary. He suspects that the branch office in the Aur Uesh District has one or more bad apples in it. Worse, from various incidents he also suspects that someone in his own office is in league with these corrupt officers, so he dare not send in any of his own people to check. He offers to pay the PCs handsomely if they will conduct an independent investigation.
- A journalist has been killed or gravely injured, and somehow the PCs have come into possession of his belongings. He may have remained conscious long enough to ask them to bring his belongings to a wife or an editor, or they may just have found it hidden away somewhere. It soon becomes clear that at least three, possibly more, different groups all want something that is hidden in the luggage. It turns out to be a holocrystal concealed in the handle of his toothbrush. The crystal contains meticulous documentation of accidents and mismanagement in connection with the Forboldn Project and of how the Colonial Office has covered up these incidents. Obviously, one of the groups that are after the crystal is working for the Colonial Office. Another is working for the local government. The rest are agents of several different Imperial nobles -- Marquis Evan of Roup and Marchioness Josephine of Efate to mention two (Count Evan and Countess Josephine for the main Traveller universe). These Imperial nobles all hope that when the Emperor gets around to appointing a baron for Forboldn, the new baron will become their vassal. Each hope that if he or she is the one to expose the problems with the Forboldn Project, he or she will be assigned the task of cleaning up the mess and thus be in a position to impress the Emperor with his or her zeal and efficiency. For added complication make the content of the crystal encrypted. The key is held by someone else: a colleague who is on the run, perhaps, or an unknown hotel thief or the aforementioned wife/editor.

Supplementary Reading

GM's may be interested in two books by Paul Anderson, *Orbit Unlimited* and *New America*, which features a planet with an atmosphere similar to that of Forboldn.

Pyramid Pick

Star Crusade (for Fading Suns)

Published by [Holistic Design, Inc.](#)

By Bill Bridges, Samuel Inabinet and Rustin Quaide

144 pages, $25.00

Star Crusade is the first major campaign expansion to *Fading Suns* since the game's release in 1996. Originally scheduled as part of a boxed set, this book is the first of two volumes describing over two dozen new worlds for this science fiction role-playing game. These worlds were all lost to the inhabitants of the Known Worlds after the disastrous collapse of the Second Republic. For centuries, their jumpgates were closed, blocking any passage to them. Now, a few brave souls have found ways around this problem, opening up a new frontier for adventure. In addition, *Star Crusade* provides a great deal of information about two major enemies of the *Fading Suns* setting: the Kurgan Caliphate and the Vuldrok Star-Nation, as well as suggestions on how to integrate their worlds into an ongoing epic.

The *Fading Suns* rulebook describes the *Kurgan Caliphate* as a mysterious vaguely Arabic empire against whom a vaguely Hispanic noble house, the Hazat, wages a lengthy war. Borrowing a page from El Cid and the Reconquista, the Hazat have asked for support from the Universal Church of the Celestial Sun by emphasizing the heretical religious views of the Kurgans. Beyond that, we know very little.

Star Crusade changes that. We learn the history of the Caliphate, including the odd story of its founding by a megalomaniacal merchantman and its development over the centuries. We also learn about its society, culture, and religion. For example, the Kurgan faith of El-Diin is in fact a variant of the Universal Church. Among its many heterodox teachings are that the Celestial Sun has a physical position in space-time and that the Prophet Zebulon (founder of the Church) chose a successor to lead the faithful after his death (the Caliph).

Fading Suns has always made a good effort to provide dramatically interesting explanations for its retro-medievalisms. The first chapter of the book is no different, offering workable justifications for the pseudo-Middle Eastern cast of the Kurgans. This isn't to say the Kurgans are a completely believable culture, but they aren't merely "Muslims in space" either. The medieval Islamic pedigree is there to be sure, but plenty of other elements are at work too, ensuring the Kurgans don't strain one's credibility overly much.

Star Crusade also offers rules for Kurgan theurgic rites and a complete character generation sequence. This information is complemented by detailed descriptions of seven worlds of the Caliphate. Employing the format first used in Imperial Survey booklets, these worlds range from battle-torn Hira to arid Al Fashir to the capital world of Irem. The level of detail and variety in these descriptions is remarkable.

If *Star Crusade* had only included information on the Kurgans, it would have been worth the price of admission. However, it devotes another large section of its pages to the Vuldrok Star-Nation. The *Fading Suns* rulebook has always given the impression that they Vuldrok were a Viking-like culture and so they are to an extent. Beneath their Nordic veneer, however, you'll find a loose alliance of several cultures (including African and Native American ones) united in raiding more "civilized" societies for booty of all sorts. Like the Kurgans, the Vuldrok aren't the most plausible of cultures, but the book makes an enjoyable case for them and that's what's really important. I can't imagine a Game Master (or player) who'll read this section and not wish to include the Vuldrok in their games because of cultural implausibility.

Like the Kurgan section, we get a lengthy look at Vuldrok history, culture, and religion, along with a new character generation sequence, theurgic rites, and other abilities. Likewise, there's a gazetteer of five Vuldrok worlds, each one providing enough details for many adventures on its surface. Anyone wanting to inject tales of epic heroism and honor will find these planets much to their liking.

The book concludes with a lengthy appendix containing odds and ends that didn't really fit anywhere else. First we get an overview of the worlds to be included in *Star Crusade*'s upcoming companion volume, *Lost Worlds*. We also get a look at a new noble house and two alien races, one of them believed long extinct in the Known Worlds. Most importantly, the appendix provides information on something no faux Viking should be without: runes. As described here, runes are ancient Anunnaki ideographs invested with mystical power. Runecasting is thus a new supernatural ability on par with psychic abilities and theurgy. I approve of their inclusion greatly, as they not only add flavor but also tie in nicely with the *Fading Suns* background.

Overall, *Star Crusade* is an excellent supplement and a model for any game's campaign expansions. While there are still far too many typos and not enough of John Bridges' evocative art, this supplement is very worthwhile. It opens up new areas of the *Fading Suns* universe without introducing a grand metaplot to spoil ongoing games. Moreover, it never provides background for its own sake, preferring that details serve the goal of creating exciting adventures. It's rare to see gaming supplements like this anymore. I heartily applaud Holistic Design's approach and hope that future volumes continue in this vein.

-- James Maliszewski

Pyramid Review

Beyond Science (for Alternity)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Sean K. Reynolds

96 pages, $18.95

Subtitled *A Guide to FX*, *Beyond Science* is a collection of "FX (special effects) powers" and rules for including such varied elements as super powers, magical spells, and religious miracles into an *Alternity* campaign. Especially useful for *Dark*Matter players*, I was personally surprised the book was published as an *Alternity* book rather than a *Dark*Matter* specific sourcebook.

At a glance, *Beyond Science* is an attractive and well written sourcebook. At its core the book truly begins to shine as is evident when the book is broken down and examined chapter by chapter.

Chapter One, FX Rules

The first chapter details the specific game rules of FX powers for use within the *Alternity* game system. Presented along the same lines as the psionics skills in the *Alternity Players Handbook*, players and gamemasters will find the rules familiar and easily understood.

The FX powers are presented as skills which are purchased in the same manner as mundane skills already presented in the basic rules although priced at a higher level than those more mundane skills. For gamemasters wishing to run a high level FX campaign, an optional rule -- FX Achievement Points -- is included. FX Achievement Points increase the number of starting skill points and may only be used for purchasing FX skills.

FX Powers have a cost for each use (usually just 1 point but some go as high as 3 points), drawing from an FX Energy Pool much like psionic skills draw from a psionic energy pool. The shortest way to describe it is simply: FX Power game mechanics function almost exactly like psionics.

Chapter Two, Using FX in the Campaign

In this chapter rules are included advising the gamemaster on how to include FX in a campaign. Three levels of FX are detailed, ranging from realistic to superheroic along with brief descriptions of possible campaign ideas. The chapter opens with a series of questions and answers regarding the inclusion of FX in a campaign (Are FX a new element to the world?, Can anyone use FX?, How common are FX, etc.) which can help a gamemaster make some very important decisions about FX and what role he wants them to play in his campaign.

The chapter closes with four different short campaign ideas. While a nice addition, they are too brief (all four fit on less than a single page) to be of any real use to a gamemaster who doesn't have the time or energy to create a completely new campaign setting on his own. They aren't even all that useful for single-session games such as those run at conventions.

Chapter Three, Arcane Magic FX

At this point, the book falls into a pattern of listing FX powers and their descriptions. The use of each chapter is

entirely dependent upon what the gamemaster plans to include in his campaign. If magic is your selection, this chapter will give you a hint of what is possible. Including magic in a campaign will almost certainly require the gamemaster to create several more "spells" in order to give mages a larger variety of choices. If a sourcebook on *Alternity* magic was produced it would go a long way toward making this chapter more useful (and most likely, obsolete).

A nice touch was the inclusion of seven magic schools. Each school has a specialization. This helps mages from different schools to at least have different spell selections than other mages (and keeps it so they aren't all carbon copies with the same choice of spells). The best way magic could be included in an *Alternity* campaign would be to make it available to only one player character in the campaign and then rare amongst NPCs.

Chapter Four, Faith FX

Faith FX are religious "miracles" or skills most easily explained to gamers as "*AD&D* clerical spells." As was done in chapter three, Faith FX are broken into categories referred to as groups or pantheons. This chapter is as useful to GMs as the Arcane Magic chapter. It suffers from the same problem of simply being too short. The author did make some interesting selections for pantheons, from voodoo to druids, and a few "fictional" religions thrown in just to keep everything balanced.

Chapter Five, Super Power FX

Covering everything other than magic and religion, super powers are best known to those of us who read comic books. This chapter, while basically identical to chapters three and four, does include a fun sidebar on radiation and its effects in a super powered campaign. If you have any interest in including such powers as shapeshifting, an assortment of different Chi powers (could be fun for those of you wanting to run mystical Hong Kong-styled adventures in *Dark*Matter* or *Star*Drive* campaigns), all kinds of fun energy powers, and even the ever-famous Wallcrawling ability, you will love this chapter.

Unfortunately, as with Arcane Magic and Faith, if super powers are not what you want in your campaign, this chapter will be almost a complete waste of your reading time.

Chapter Six, FX Creatures

This chapter was the biggest surprise I found in the book and turned out to be my favorite. Presenting a wide assortment of magical and super-powered creatures (immediately starting idea after idea for cool *Alternity* adventures in my head), GMs should easily find this chapter alone worth the price of admission. Each creature includes a short description and the game stats necessary to include it in a campaign.

Creatures include angels, demons, elementals, constructs (especially cool for *Dark*Matter* campaigns), and a few undead (specifically ghosts, skeletons, vampires, and zombies). This chapter alone warranted *Beyond Science* being larger than 96 pages.

Chapter Seven, FX Devices

This is a very short (just 3 pages) chapter describing how to construct what are labeled FX Devices but are better known as magic items, holy relics, and superscience gadgets. Some examples are included and the construction process itself is fairly simple requiring just 4 steps (what FX skill the device duplicates, how it works, how it gets power to operate, and finishing details). It's a decent system, a quick system, and one that feels more "tacked on" than anything else in the book and easily the worst chapter.

Final Opinion

At its core, the problems with *Beyond Science* are all caused by space constraints; the book is just too small to give a detailed examination of each FX power category (or type of creature) and would have been a much stronger book (and

more valuable) if it had been about 160 pages rather than the published 96. A longer book would have allowed the author to expand upon his work, presenting more useful information to gamemasters and players than the short listings of FX powers he managed to squeeze in.

This isn't to say I disliked the book. I thought considering the space he had to work in, the author of **Beyond Science** created a well-written product filled with numerous, excellent ideas a determined gamemaster could easily work into a campaign. The enclosed appendix on creating new FX skills is a blessing for GMs with the time to use the rules. For GMs without time to create new FX skills, I would suggest allowing players to create them and hand them over for approval (with perhaps just a little tweaking to make them more balanced).

-- Philip Reed

The Ugly Yellow Underside

The Promise of Utopia

In the beginning, when the net was fresh and new, I was told by those who were smart and wise that the online world was going to be the new utopia - for real this time, honestly. I could hook up and connect and communicate with exciting people all over the world. The positive effect on mankind was going to be enormous. According to the hype, through the power of the net I would evolve into a more sentient being. Heck, if I paid attention, I would actually be able to *feel* it happen. One minute, I'd be another poor jerk sitting on my butt in front of the television watching *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire* with a beer in one hand and a bag of Doritos in another, and the next thing I would know, the monolith would be in my living room and I'd realize it was full of stars.

But the supposed evolution, promised to us by Microsoft and Apple and Sun during the Super Bowl, never happened. Here we are, on the edge of the new Millennium, and the only thing the net has successfully brought into our living rooms are retouched images of Lara Croft, naked. We have porn and eBay and networks dedicated to "women's issues" and a continuous stream of pointless pop-up web ads and even *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire*. We've actually been able to *devolve* like a bad *Star Trek* episode.

Woman gamers, being a resourceful and tenacious lot just like their male counterparts, have been able to overcome the tepid mediocrity of the failed utopia and game in the net[1] anyway, just like they're able to game in loud restaurants, noisy dormitory rooms, and basements filled with three inches of runoff water. They've joined the net community and helped to drag gaming online in every form imaginable, from the simplicity of email to the insane complexity of the graphical MUD. They've finally come out to play.

Unfortunately, it's not a perfect utopia out there. Most of the time, it's not even a good place to be, because, like soylent green, it's made of people.

The Reality of Dystopia

The online gamer learns two things very quickly.

The first is that the textual medium, while belying a façade of antiquity harkening back to the computer dark ages, is extremely addictive. There is something to be said about the power of text and its ability to draw both the reader and the writer into its weave. It seems innocent enough, but once the player has learned to interact in the storyline, he or she is hooked. No amount of fancy graphics or fast hardware will ever replicate the soul-sucking addictiveness of the immersive experience where the player can control their every description, action and fantasy just by typing.

The second is that the net is full of sociopaths.

It's a giant freak magnet. It should have a big, glowing, neon sign which reads, in 100 foot tall letters, "If you're unable to function in human society, please, game here! There are dozens of fine people you can accost with your own personal neurosis! Come sign up for a thirty day trial, no questions asked!" I think I have several pieces of spam that use this as their advertising slogan.

There are many fine essays written about law, ethics and morality in cyberspace, but the fact remains that some human beings are just monkeys with the unerring ability to hit the right combination of keys and spit out Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. It's an unconditional fact that, as part of the online gaming community, I'm going to be approached, hit on, felt up, mugged, murdered, and forced to listen to someone's personal problems for hours on end. I'm going to run into people who believe everyone else's characters are just disposable waste, and those who are unable to separate the game from reality. It's unclear which of these is actually the worst offender, but after sitting through an unending stream of "age/sex/location," the common fishing lure to reel in cybersex partners, it makes me start to wonder about the

continuing existence of the medium, let alone that of the human race.

Freaks and Weirdos -- The Normal People

It's the freaks that get me down.

It's entertaining to be a woman in the online gaming circuit. As this Norwegian approaches me for the fiftieth time to come back to his private room bouncie bouncie, I start to feel a little disturbed. But when I switch my gender and my name, and a suspiciously different Norwegian starts hitting on me, asking me to come back to *her* room for deceptively similar bouncie bouncie, I start to think the Japanese rite of seppuku might not actually be a bad thing to try.

Cybersex is just part of the medium. After being inundated with mostly naked computer game icons, a litany of scathing exposes warning me to "protect my children," and the endless parade of Sally Jesse Raphael episodes focusing on the evils of cyberspace, this sort of behavior can hardly be condemned, let alone chastised. It's as if society has buckled under and accepted that the entire point of the net is to allow those who are otherwise limited in the relationship department to fill their late Saturday night with something other than reruns on the Playboy channel. It's almost encouraged for the relationship-crippled to see women as sex bait in the cyberspace public arena. I just wish they would wait until I'm done gaming.

The sins of the net are hardly limited to men chasing women. A fine observer of online digital life would be able to watch an entire anthropology of sexual behavior including, but not limited to, women chasing men, women chasing women, men chasing men, and the occasional nymphomaniac rabbit in a ball gag. From all the backroom hanky-panky, I would almost expect the introduction banners on the games to read, "Welcome to my MUSH. I kiss you!!!"[2]

The sociopathy of the typical online mental case isn't limited to the relatively innocuous approaches for some quick digital nookie - those are an accepted fact of life. The real problems come from those who are either unwilling to be a part of the game or get so into the game that they no longer live on our plane of existence. They represent the far ends of the gaming spectrum - the two different types of online predator who gladly give online gaming the bad name it occasionally rightfully deserves.

Those who dwell in enmity toward the online community pose their own special problems. They're the ones who will interrupt gaming scenes with a little casual murder for their own personal entertainment or, on discovering an ability to not only pose[3] themselves, but also other people, happily force others to pose for their own greedy amusement. They're the ones who see the games, not as a land of earnest gamers coming together as a community, but as a place filled with little nerdy pinheads who are easy prey. And the sad fact is that this particular kind of digital vermin is usually male, and he is willing to avail himself on anyone who comes across his path - especially women, if given half a chance. Any player, male or female, is going to feel somewhat humiliated by this kind of activity, and no one wants to be player-killed or be subjected to the digital version of rape, regardless if it's "real" or not. Even the revenge fulfillment that accompanies digital justice, through the process of either booting the character and changing their password, or applying a site ban to keep the offender from logging back in, cannot fully recompense for the sexual exploitation of a few key poses at the hands of a mentally unstable player - and anyone who even contemplates digital rape isn't particularly stable to begin with. As the unmentionable side of netsex, this happens all too frequently, yet, in certain mediums, it is all but unavoidable. In IRC, it's ever present, almost as if this sort of childish antipathy was part of the fabric of the underlying network. They're predators, clear and simple, and the idea is to not be their quarry, or let them ruin the game.

On the flip side are those who are so involved with their online universe they can no longer separate the fantasy of the online game from reality. They are those who announce from the highest mountain that their character isn't *just* a character, it really *is* them, a little digital representation of themselves in all their wonderful glory, and we should be thankful that they came to game in undiluted purity. When things go wrong, and they always do, it isn't because of them, it's because of the game. These are people who will actually *contemplate suicide* if anything happens to their character because, if their character was dead, they would no longer had a reason to live. Without the culture of the online game, which is on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, these gamers no longer find any purpose in their

lives. They lend a certain amount of credence to the hysterical reports in the news of Internet addiction, because without the game, these people would find themselves lost in a sea of unmitigated reality. They *need* the game, and they're willing to bend, twist, and push people out of the way to get it. It's not just another Vampire MUSH or Planescape MUD, it's their entire lives. And the sad fact is that most of these gamers are depressingly female. While there are a large number of guys who fill out the ranks of the neurotically addicted, the majority of these wonderful additions to our gene pool are the friendly gals that we're all frantically introducing to the role-playing scene. Occasionally, we all get what we ask for.

In the middle of this mess of rampant hormones and neurosis is the run of the mill gamer - a fine, upstanding specimen of the human race who has come to the game to do nothing more than play. Neither freaky nor overly normal, neither antipathetic nor neurotically obsessed, these gamers, both male and female in equal doses, fill out the rank and file of most online games from the WebRPGs to Ultima Online. They protect themselves with the power of **/ignore** and **/gag** commands - the commands which allow players to ignore all messages from the offender and gifts from the Internet Gods - and focus on the game. They are the gamer who navigates the dangerous waters of the freaks and weirdos that the Internet attracts like a moth to a bug zapper to seek out the private IRC servers, the application-only MUSHes and the closed PBEMs so they can play their *game* unhindered, unaccosted, and safe while avoiding the large, public arenas. With them, online gaming is the undoubted future of role-playing and ensures a long life for the hobby as a whole. Without them, the online scene would be handed over to those would abuse it with a smile and a wink.

The net *needs* gamers - normal gamers, men gamers, women gamers, happy gamers, and gamers who want to game. But... from what I have seen, I have seen the future, and I might need therapy.

The problem is that the Internet has not presented anything new to our culture, except, possibly, Beanie Baby porn. All it has done is magnify what already exists, and what exists isn't so great. Human beings are human beings, and they bring their humanity online with them, for better and occasionally for worse. It pervades every corner of the net, and it squats over the games like a hulking beast reminding us that, for all our technology advances, the net is still a human creation, and these are human beings who play the games - for better or for worse.

So. Are you aware of the power of the Internet?

Next Time

In response to the WotC survey results, everyone, everywhere, are running polls to determine how many gamers there actually are. And guess what? There aren't many women who game. Not even me - which came as a bit of a shock, lemme tell ya. And heck, I'll tell you just why there aren't that many women in gaming.

* * *

[1] See the original essay, [A Very Introductory Guide to Online Gaming](#), for an overview.

[2] [Salon Magazine --- I Kiss You!!!!!](#)

[3] Pose: There are two kinds of ways to express oneself in a real time medium -- speaking and posing. Posing conveys an action. For example, typing `pose jumps for joy.` displays `'yourname' jumps for joy.` A variation, emitting, is a command without prefixing your character name. For example, typing `@em The fried chicken throttles Lucy.` produces `The fried chicken throttles Lucy.`. Emitting is also called *spoofing*.

Ether-Gods of Mars! The SYRTIS Dossier

"'How long you been here, Grandma?' said Lustig.
'Ever since we died.' she said tartly."
-- Ray Bradbury, "Mars Is Heaven"

Every now and again, you just want gumbo. I've had some ingredients simmering away for a while, waiting to be dished out in a column or two. Among them, the notion of Mars as afterlife I mentioned <u>a few columns back</u>, the overlapping fads for Martian communication and spiritism at last century's end, some peculiar hints in Brazilian candomblé and Haitian vodoun, and the odd career of George Ellery Hale. This week, I'm dumping them all into a roux of **GURPS Steampunk** ether and **GURPS Voodoo** spirit world, and serving up a campaign frame bubbling with weirdness. Let's kick it up a notch.

"One of [Kardec's] principles was that the spirits form in space groups or phalanxes of entities on a common moral or intellectual level that came together as a result of their affinities . . . And was it not likely that these groups in interplanetary space should obey leaders who might well be the gods of the candomblé?"
-- Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil*

The theosophical notion of the planets, and Mars particularly, as an abode of the dead or of spiritual entities, goes back a surprisingly long way. Though not, likely, as long as Bruce Rux thinks it does in *Architects of the Underworld,* where he postulates connections between Egypt's Duat (the land of the dead) and Mars. But, it's interesting to point them out. A papyrus of Princess Nejmet refers to the journey to Duat as the "Ascending" to the "Imperishable Star," and the Duat is also known as the Red Land to the West -- a common term for afterworlds from the Hopi to the Celts to the Chinese. Mars, of course, is the paradigmatic Red Land; and as we all know, it possesses enigmatic Pyramids and a sphinxlike Face. Is it pure coincidence that one of Mars' largest regions is called Elysium, the afterworld of the Greeks?

Theosophist H. P. Blavatsky's spirit masters, the Mahatmas, were uncharacteristically cagy about Mars, variously affirming it as part of the Chain of Planets, and denying that its entities had anything in common with the Earth. What they were trying to cover up, a channeler named Catherine Elise Muller (better known as Helene Smith) found in 1896 thanks to a series of mediumistic trances in which she explored Mars through astral projection. She found it bedecked with canals, although her interactions with the actual Martians remained dubious. (Angel contactee Emmanuel Swedenborg reported discussions with "masked men from Mars" in 1758.) It's obvious, then, that the Martians are powerful spirit beings connected to the dead, that they're ambiguous and perhaps actively deceitful, and that astral (or ghostly) travel will get you to a Mars of canals, Pyramids, and other excitements more like a vision quest than a Mars Observer photo.

"The Vaudoux [Voodoo] is nothing compared to the Don Pedro . . . dance, also known in the western part [Haiti] of Santo Domingo since 1768 . . . [T]his shaking is extremely violent, and to increase it still further [they] drink, while dancing, brandy in which they have mixed finely ground gunpowder . . ."
-- Moreau de Saint-Méry, *De la danse* (1801)

Which brings us back to the Afro-Caribbean religions of ecstatic spiritual possession, commonly called voodoo. Kardecist Umbanda (a syncretic combination of Brazilian candomblé and French spiritual mediumship of the type that took Helene Smith to Mars) explicitly places some of the orixa, or loa (powerful spirit entities, almost junior gods in some cases) in interplanetary space. This is an explicit departure from traditional voodoo beliefs, which place the spirits under the ocean in "Guinée, the Island Below The Water." This older tradition, the Rada tradition, is the "cooler" tradition, associated with water. Newer traditions, such as the Dom Pedro (or Petro) tradition in Haitian vodoun, associate themselves with fire. Symbolic element of Mars. The Petro traditions derive from slave resistance movements in the New World, and use gunpowder as incense to draw down the Petro loa. Gunpowder, again, associates strongly with Mars, planet of war. Even devout followers of the loa treat the Petro gods gingerly, rejecting their evil intent and invoking them as insurance or protection in virtually all cases. Negative energies, such as death or deceit, have fallen into the Petro orbit, with the "dark side" of the loa moving to the Petro world of fire rather than the

Rada "island" of water.

Powerful spirit beings connected to the dead, ambiguous and perhaps actively deceitful, and where did we just hear that? Fringe scholars such as Milo Rigaud trace voodoo back to ancient Egypt, to priests fleeing from Persian invasion into the African interior. Could the Petro loa have found a passage back to the Duat, to the Red Land, to Mars? Does the gunpowder ritual of the Petro dance raise energies allowing more and more loa to reach Mars and gain strength? Are the Martian pyramids (visible to obsessed dreamers and astral travelers only) simply the loa's adaptation of the old Egyptian Red Land? Perhaps, then, the canals, likewise, are vèvèrs, mystic patterns and sigils of the Petro loa marking their presence on the planet of the gunpowder god.

"From 1948 and until recently it was the largest telescope in the world. The idea and design came from a brilliant and wealthy astronomer named George Ellery Hale. Actually the idea was presented to Hale one night while he was playing billiards. An elf climbed in his window and told him to get money from the Rockefeller Foundation for a telescope."
-- Fox Mulder, in *The X-Files,* "Little Green Men."

Now, I've [previously noted](#) another trope alive with deception and violence, connected to the dead -- the mirror. The mirror, of course, is the sacred gateway of Legba, the Opener of the Way -- and of Legba's Petro counterpart, Maître-Carrefour, the Master of the Crossroads. (The canals of Mars criscross numberless times.) Horus, the Egyptian god who gave his name to the Egyptians' Mars, was also an Opener of the Way, possessed of one blue eye (for Earth) and one red eye (for Mars). (Apropos of nothing, Ogoun Jé-Rouge, the Petro loa of iron, fire, and war, is called Ogoun The Red-Eyed.) Do the mirrors in reflecting telescopes help open the way for the Petro loa to influence the minds of men?

George Ellery Hale might have thought so. After building the largest refracting telescope in the world, at Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin, he encountered an "elf," a little green [ultraterrestrial](#), who gave him the idea to build a much larger reflecting telescope on Mount Wilson in Los Angeles. He began in 1904, and built a larger one still on Mount Wilson in 1928, eventually designing the largest reflector of its time on Mount Palomar near San Diego. (Interestingly, Hale also played a key role in convincing streetcar magnate Henry Huntington to establish the Huntington Gallery and Museum, which holds some of the world's greatest Buddhist art, rarest books, and a complete photographic copy of the Dead Sea Scrolls.) The "elf" continued to advise him on practical matters involving the observatory's operation until Hale's death in 1938, ten years before Palomar's completion.

" One welcome event in this hectic year of 1902 was a visit to the United States by England's famous Lord Kelvin, who proclaimed himself in complete agreement with Tesla . . . that Mars was signaling America."
-- Margaret Cheney, *Tesla: Man Out Of Time*

Having opened the spiritual path in 1768 with the creation of the Petro rituals, and the astral path in 1896 through Helene Smith's medium, the loa moved on to the etheric path. Astronomers William H. Pickering and Percival Lowell (greatest of the Martian canal-finders) reported "code flashes" from Mars in 1900 while working on Martian canal-mapping at Flagstaff Observatory. (A flagstaff is, of course, a key type of vodoun drogue, a powerful emblem for ritual communication and conjuration of loa.) Even more impressively, the famed inventor Nikola Tesla became convinced that he was in radio communication with Mars starting that same year. Tesla was friends with George Ellery Hale, and also with Sir William Crookes, the well-known British physicist -- and expert endorser of spiritual mediumship. Could Crookes have combined Tesla's communicator with his own mediumistic apparatus, possibly including Thomas Edison's top-secret "necrophone" project, to create an etheric transmitter that would not only send human voices to Mars, but human souls and spirits? The connections between ether and ectoplasm, between astral travel and etheric transmission, may be murky, but they seem intuitively present. Surely such a genius as Sir William Crookes could have reconciled them into a practical apparatus for astral-etheric interplanetary travel.

"You are here especially to help polarize Mars in preparation for our emergence . . . whereby we will again reinhabit the surface of Mars. So your consciousness here within and upon this planet is of vital importance to this world."
-- "Nur-El" of Mars, quoted in *Tesla Speaks,* Vol. 12, by Ruth Norman and Thomas Miller

And in this **GURPS Steampunk-Voodoo** crossover campaign frame, that's just what he did. Crookes (already under fire for his support of fringe beliefs like spiritism) secretly established the Society for Research into Transmissions

across Interplanetary Space (or S.R.T.I.S., soon elided into "SYRTIS," after another major Martian feature) in 1896 after hearing of Helene Smith's journeys. (Parallels with the Order of the Hourglass from *GURPS Time Travel* are entirely intentional, I assure you.) By the time he endorsed Tesla's opinion in 1902, the Society had perfected astral travel to Mars; the meeting with Tesla gave them etheric technology that made longer stays and independent journeys (without Martian "spirit guides") possible.

Which is when it all came apart. SYRTIS operatives, able to roam about Mars unsupervised, quickly discovered that Mars was the home of the Petro loa busily reviving the slumbering ruins of the ancient Egyptian Hell. Petro emissaries began conspiring against SYRTIS on Earth in Nigeria, Jamaica, and elsewhere -- eventually reaching into America and even England. Percival Lowell, George Ellery Hale, none of the great American astronomers could be trusted -- SYRTIS had to work alone and in secret. SYRTIS operatives might begin Inside the Front Lines (as *GURPS Voodoo* puts it) as 150-200 point astral projectors or hero-scholars transmitted etherically (the devices grant Astral Projection, or Path of the Spirit Spiritwalking rituals). But it's a race against time and balky electroplasmic technology -- every ritually consumed gunpowder charge strengthens the loa in their plan to submerge the white lands in global war and mass murder.

"I have devoted much of my time during the year past to perfecting of a new small and compact apparatus by which energy in considerable amounts can now be flashed through interstellar space without the slightest dispersion. I had in mind to confer with my friend, George E. Hale . . . regarding the possible use of this invention in connection with his own researches."
-- Nikola Tesla, undelivered speech (1937)

By the time it becomes a *GURPS Cliffhangers-Voodoo* campaign, the Petro loa have won tremendous victories. World War One sent hordes of angry dead into the interplanetary gulfs to labor as spiritual spear-carriers; the Petro can now become full-fledged In-Betweeners with an actual physical base on Mars and cults all across the colonized world. Some of those dead become the new wave of ghosts plaguing England (and allowing us to pull in *GURPS Undead*). New advances in etheric technology allow physical transport to Mars aboard ether-ships, but SYRTIS can fall victim to the vampiric thought-entities Petro conjures to defend its planet (the Welles Martians from *GURPS Warehouse 23,* of course). SYRTIS teams have to be full-fledged 250-300 point Spirit Warriors, grim of mien and steely of eye.

With the horrors of World War Two, it seems that the Petro might have won. Their 1938 invasion was only turned back at the last minute by SYRTIS germ warfare and the Tesla projector intercepted by SYRTIS before it could fall into Hale's hands. The ectoplasmic blast zones still haunt New Jersey twenty years later. Worse yet, the Petro loa have begun to contact whole new groups, posing as benevolent aliens -- ironically, often "Nordics" from "Venus." The most dangerous foes of SYRTIS, the Aetherius Society, coalesced in 1954 around contactee George King, who channeled "Aetherius of Venus" and "Jesus Christ of Mars Sector Six." Key contactee cultist George Hunt Williamson kept the Petro tied in to his old American Nazi buddies, and through them to the remains of the Fourth Reich given refuge on Mars by the Petro. The SYRTIS teams must be jut-jawed, death-dealing 400-500 point Spirit Masters to survive this *GURPS Atomic Horror-Voodoo* campaign frame, with the potential of evolving either into Black Ops or Lensmen depending on the level of grittiness or cosmicity the GM desires. SYRTIS was able to drive King out of England in 1960, but his Aetherius Society (along with thousands of other cults, both overtly bloody and seemingly benign) still works against them as dupes of the ether-gods of Mars!

Pyramid Pick

Compact Sorcerer

Published by [MicroTactix](#)

Designed by Greg Poehlein and Guy McLimore

Art by Gary M. Williams

Rulebook, 2 game boards, 30 spell cards, 8 magic item cards, and 17 cardboard figures, $9.00

There comes a time in every *Compact Warrior*'s life where he or she is no longer satisfied beating opponents senseless with swords and hammers, and yearns instead to engulf his or her enemies in ghastly fire. Fortunately for them, MicroTactix has created *Compact Sorcerer*, the first expansion for their *Compact Warrior* board game.

Compact Warrior is a game of man-to-man fantasy combat played on a square grid map using cardboard figures and ten-sided dice. *Compact Sorcerer* provides the rules, skills, and spells necessary for wizards to enter the fray. Even with the addition of magic, the board game retains its quick pace and remains generic enough that it can replace the combat systems of fantasy role playing games.

As with *Compact Warrior*, the *Compact Sorcerer* rules are clear and suffer from few editing mistakes. The black and white art is satisfactory and the cardboard figures are sturdy. The two games were clearly created by the same team and work together seamlessly.

Compact Sorcerer adds two skills, two actions, and Mana points to the game. The new skills, Magic and Spell Targeting, are the skills that define a character as a sorcerer. Casting a spell requires a successful roll on the wizard's Magic skill. If the spell is a missile attack, such as Fireshot, then the player must also make a successful Spell Targeting roll to hit the intended victim. Like regular missile weapons, missile spells benefit from close range, careful aiming, and dexterous characters. Sorcerers use the Cast Spell action to activate their spells, and this action becomes more difficult when under attack. Each spell deducts Mana points from the character which can be replenished only by rest or by the Gather Mana action, which restores a small amount of Mana during battle.

Compact Sorcerer does more than simply replace weapons with spells, though. Sorcerers are a challenge because they not only have to buy spells with skill points, thereby giving up weapon and fighting skills, but they also can Scale spells during combat. Scaling allows characters to increase the power of spell, as well as its difficulty and Mana cost, as desired during combat. Thus, a wizard can cast the simple Kinetic Shot for a small amount of damage, or can spend more Mana for more damage while increasing the risk of failing the casting roll.

In a board game without a game master, magic can become a problem if the effects of the spells are subjective or if conditions make spell casting questionable. *Compact Sorcerer* navigates through these traps by limiting its 30 spells to those that have quantitative and clear effects. It also classifies spells so that targets and ranges are very clear. Players will not spend the game arguing over who can cast what at whom.

The only exception to *Compact Sorcerer*'s clarity is the Illusion spell. This is not a fault of the authors, who dedicate an entire page of text on how to use illusions in the game, but of the nature of illusions. Players are supposed to write

down, in secret, what objects are illusions and which are real. Illusions are only discovered when a character touches it. But what happens when an arrow passes through an illusion? Or if someone just tosses a rock at it? Without a GM to handle the situation, the game can degenerate into tedious arguments that depend on what your definition of the word "touched" is. Illusions cause more disagreements than fun in a board game and we chose to leave them out of our games.

While both **Compact Warrior** and **Compact Sorcerer** have clearly written rules and creative mechanics, **Compact Sorcerer** fares better on character balance. **Compact Warrior** lacked a balancing mechanic for weapons, meaning that players always chose the most powerful weapons, resulting in battles where everyone wields great swords or warhammers. Because powerful spells are more difficult to cast and cost more Mana and skill points, sorcerers are not likely to load up on Mystic Domination and Wizard's Wrath. The game forces players to choose wisely rather than simply maxing their magical power.

Compact Sorcerer is a successful expansion to the **Compact Warrior** game and provides a quick yet detailed and strategically challenging magic system. MicroTactix has created another satisfying component to their inexpensive game line.

--Brad Weier

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Random Thought Table: The Torg Story

Dennis, Kathryn, Michael: I am soooooooooooooooooooooo sorry.

But I get ahead of myself. You see, there are certain unwritten rules as a GM:

- Don't kill the PCs in their sleep.
- Don't have unavoidable catastrophies, manglings, or life-altering changes happen to characters without being sure the players will appreciate it.
- Don't make it *look* like you're leading the PCs around with a ring through their noses (no matter what the truth is).
- Don't make your players be mind-readers.

Yes, indeed. . . don't make your players be mind-readers.

Two years ago, I had the idea to start up a ***Torg*** campaign. This was several years after the line had more or less ended, and a few years after the last module (appropriately entitled ***War's End***) came out. And, as I said last week, I like collecting complete lines.

So I amassed the ***Torg*** line, came up with a story, and sketched it out in thirteen parts. It had several plot twists and divergences, so that even the players who had played the game for years as it was being released would be surprised. I was excited.

The first adventure went as well as any new system's first adventure does (despite my Canada incident. . . but that's another story). The second adventure went very well. And then came the third adventure.

The third adventure revolved around a mysterious black dome in South America. There were reports that none of the teams sent there had returned, and the dome was growing exponentially. So naturally the PCs are supposed to investigate it. They do such, figure out what's going on (basically, for ***Torg***-ists out there, all its axioms were zero, making it very dangerous to disconnect), and enter.

They get to the center, and encounter this giant clock, with an old man inside. (As an aside, I'm a big fan of the mysterious old man. Good Mysterious Old Man, Bad Mysterious Old Man, Inscrutable Mysterious Old Man. . . I've used them all.) The old man had a companion, an evil NPC whom the players had encountered in an earlier adventure.

In the real world, it was 9 PM. We'd been gaming less than an hour.

"Approach. . . and speak correctly," said the mysterious old man.

The PCs went toward the seated figure, and they made some attempts at speaking to the old man, but were largely ignored.

After a time, the old man spoke again. "I am a traveler. After many years, we have come here. It is imperative we communicate. And so I ask your names."

The PCs try to talk to him, again with mixed results. "My name's Eva," said one character, who was ignored. "I'm Arthur," said another, who was greeted warmly by the man. "Arthur? A lovely name. I approve. And your companion?" "She's Eva," the same PC said. . . and he found himself ignored by the old man.

Now, to make a very long story short, the PCs eventually figure out that there's something odd about the way the old man speaks (again, I'm cutting large sections of dialogue), and the old man will refuse to communicate with them unless they can figure out the pattern and use it to talk with him. But no one can figure out what the pattern is.

After a long while, Dennis figures out the pattern, and has a conversation.

"It falls to us to be ambassadors of the earth," he said.

"Oh, truly? Is this a duty you take lightly?" the old man responds.

"I cannot say we do. And yet we are compelled. If you would speak with us, we can speak with you."

"Indubitably. I approve of your manners, and hope we can continue speaking properly."

"It is my wish as well."

"After this discussion, then, may you go in peace."

"Indeed."

And the PCs departed.

In the real world, it was 3 AM.

The pattern was *(deep breath)* that the old man began every sentence with a vowel. The PCs needed to do the same to have a conversation.

To which I feel the need to ask:

WHAT THE SAM HILL WAS I THINKING?!?

Even if you realized the pattern on paper (and if you did, my hat's off to you), it's a far cry from figuring that out in a real dialogue. No, I expected my players to be mind-readers. . . to reach into the crooked nannies of my mind and pull out my intent. And my players, being unable to bend spoons with their powerful psionic abilities, failed. And so, from 9 PM to 3 AM, they suffered.

Try to wrap your mind around that. Six hours of staring at each other. Six hours of not having a good time. Take the worst movie you've seen. Watch it from beginning to end. Then, after it's over, call up people you'd rather be spend time with -- people you could be having fun with -- and say the following: "I'm just letting you know that, instead of having a good time with you right now, I'm about to rewind the worst movie I've ever seen and watch it again." And then, indeed, watch it again. Every frame. Stare at your watch. Squirm in your seat. Ask yourself, "Why am I here?" After it's over a second time, if it's a three hour movie, you're done. If it's a two hour movie, rewind and watch it again.

I had no backup plan, no contingency, no hints, no clues. . . nothing in mind except the PCs traipsing in there, spending a few minutes chatting with Old Guy, figuring out The Puzzle, and getting the information they needed. The adventure was on a timetable, so they didn't have a choice to leave and come back. None of their tech was working, so they couldn't ask for help. The only other person to interact with was a previous antagonist.

And so it bears repeating:

WHAT THE SAM HILL WAS I THINKING?!?

Columnist Ted Rall has a question he asks people: "What's the worst thing you've ever done?" And he's wary of people who don't have an answer; if you don't know what the worst thing you've ever done is, you don't know your limits. You're capable of anything, and anything can go wrong with you.

Well, when it comes to GMing, the worst thing I've ever done is by far the *Torg* Incident. I took three friends and

drove them to the brink of furiousness and tedium. I violated the sacred trust the players place in their GM to have a good time with their meager time off. I'm convinced the only reason they didn't tie me to the back of Kathryn's Chrysler LeBaron and drag me through downtown Tallahassee was that everyone was too exhausted.

I'm telling you this because now you know the worst thing I've ever done as a GM. I hope I never top it, and I hope you learn something from it, too. What that is, I'm honestly not sure. Have backup plans; don't make your players be mind-readers; don't let me GM *Torg*. . . any of these are good pieces of advice. I've been running a ***Sorcerers Crusade*** campaign off and on lately, and I had an interesting plot twist I wanted to throw at them. So I asked, "How much do you trust me?" And there was an uncomfortable silence, and Dennis said, "I don't *Torg* trust you." And I can't blame them.

Needless to say, the *Torg* campaign died, and it's all my fault. So. . . Dennis, Kathryn, Michael. . . my players whom I subjected to my awful *Torg* session: I am *sooooooooooooooooooooo* sorry.

Perhaps, for those of you who've been GMing as long or longer than I have, you'll take a moment to figure out: What's the worst thing I've ever done as a GM?

And then you'll take steps never to let it happen again.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Fading Suns Players Companion***, p. 21

(two stars) "The Earth-creature shows intelligence, picking up our box to attack its soft, defenseless underside."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

By Mike Mayer

Art by Brian Snoddy

In honor of the release of Lord of the Fries De-Lux, here's a variant for you to serve up when business is slow and you can find only two customers frequenting your restaurant.

Setup

Remove and put aside as many cards from the deck as you deem necessary; about 20 or so works well. Or you can play with the whole bunch if you don't mind holding a heck-of-a-lot of cards in your hand.

Start out by dealing three hands - one for each player and one for a draw pile (henceforth known as the Slaw Bile).

Turn over the top card of the Slaw Bile and place the card face up beside the Slaw Bile. Any time during the game that the face-up card is taken, replace it with another from the top of the Slaw Bile.

Rules

Play as if using the normal rules except as described below:

- **IF THE LEAD "CALLS" AN ORDER** and if a player passes, he gives a card to the other player and then takes a card from the Slaw Bile (the top facedown card or the face up one).
- **IF THE LEAD "ROLLS" AN ORDER** and if a player passes, he gives the Lead a card, and the Lead takes an additional card from the Slaw Bile (the top facedown card or the face up one). A passing Lead will wind up giving himself a card and then will take one from the Slaw Bile.
- **IF THE DECK RUNS OUT**, play as if using the normal rules. On "calls" that are passed, a player simply gives a card to the other player. On "rolls" that are passed, a passing non-Lead player gives the Lead a card. A passing Lead player gives himself a card.

*Toon*iversal Proudly Presents

When Swineosaurs Ruled The Earth!

by Doc Cross

Art by Derek Stevens

Huge jaws full of teeth, claws that can rip a person in half, mighty roars that instill terror in the hearts of their prey, curly tails and piggy snouts. . . the swineosaurs truly are the masters of their primeval world. Journey with us now as we take a look at these prehysterical porkers in the world of *Toon*. And please keep your hands inside the vehicle at all times unless you want to get them bitten off.

Tyrannoboarus Rex

This carnivorous swineosaur is the undisputed big pig on the block. Standing 25 feet high and 45 feet long, with big sharp 12 inch teeth, Tyrannoboarus will eat anything it can catch. And with a Speed of 9, it can catch quite a few things! The bite of a Tyrannoboarus does 2D+2 points of Chomped On **REAL** Good damage. Tyrannoboarus has very small front limbs that are almost useless. Many of the other swineosaurs like to make jokes about that, but never when Tyrannoboarus might hear them. Still, Tyrannoboarus **KNOWS** they are making fun of him, so he is often very cranky.

If *Toon* characters ever thaw a frozen swineosaur out of a huge block of ice so it can rampage through a modern city, the odds are that it will be a Tyrannoboarus Rex. And after being frozen for 65 million years, it is sure to be in a bad mood. The best way to deal with an upset tyrannoboarus is to run away! Fast! While screaming!

Velociporkers

Although they are much smaller than Tyrannoboarus, Velociporkers are almost as dangerous. If they are hunting in a pack (which they usually do), they are even more dangerous. If they are hungry (which they usually are), they are incredibly dangerous! Velociporkers are about 7 feet long and can move at a Speed of 12! They have a mouth full of sharp teeth (1D+2 points of Chomp! damage) and a big sharp toe claw (2D of Sliced Up Like A Salami damage) that can rip their prey open or, at a party, be used to slice birthday cake. Any character attacked by Velociporkers will soon resemble a tray full of cold cuts.

Velociporkers have a smarts of 6, which is genius level for a swineosaur and pretty darned high for Toon characters in general. Still, they can be easy to Fast Talk, but you really do have to talk **FAST!** Once they attack, talking won't do any good. Try telling them that a Tyrannoboarus or a Carnoporkus was making fun of them. If that doesn't work, offer to manicure their toe claws. Velociporkers are quite vain, so they'll probably agree. At that point, just tell them you need to go get your manicure kit and then **RUN!** Just remember that Velociporkers hold a grudge for a long time.

Porkycephalosaurus

These swineosaurs might look kind of goofy, what with their lumpy domed heads, but they are not to be messed with. An angry Porkycephalosaurus can headbutt for 3D of Headbutted Into The Next County damage. Fortunately, the 15' long Porkycephalosaurus is a peaceful plant eater and only attacks if provoked. Of course, this being *Toon*, that will probably happen a lot. In fact, it's not hard to imagine a group of these swineosaurs playing soccer with a few characters. *Heh heh heh.*

Porkycephalosaurus are not very smart, so they are easy to Fast Talk. In fact, it would be pretty easy to convince them to help you do something. Just promise them lots of succulent plants to eat and say nice things about their heads.

Hadrosowrus

This is a common type of plant eating swineosaur. Known as the duckbilled swineosaurs, they are pretty funny looking. Other swineosaurs might tease them by saying "quack, quack" or "Hey, duckface." Hardrosowrus is not very bright though, so the insults go unnoticed. They stand 18' tall and are up to 30' long. The main danger from this type of swineosaur is getting trampled by a herd of them. This would do 4D+2 of Trampled By Funny Looking Swineosaurs damage.

Hadrosowrus is a good parent to its young. It is not uncommon to see them on picnics or playing a game of catch with the little ones or attending Little League games. Annoying a baby Hadrosowrus is a pretty fast way to get some Angry Mother Duckbilled Swineosaur damage.

Brontosausagus

This is one of the largest swineosaurs, being over 75' long and weighing 35 tons. Getting trampled by one of these long-necked and long-tailed plant-eaters will do 6D of Smashed Flatter Than A Duck's Foot damage. Brontosausagus has very few enemies because it is so huge. It also has very few friends because it tends to step on them by accident. If

characters are nice to a Brontosausagus, it might let them ride on its back. A Brontosausagus raised from a baby will make a great pet, but beware of having a 35 ton pet jump on your lap.

Brontosausagus tend to live in herds of from 10 to 30 individuals. If something does manage to frighten them, they will stampede. Once the stampede starts, it won't stop for 2D+2 turns. Everything in the herd's path will be crushed. Since a Brontosausagus only has a Smarts of 3, it is entirely possible for a stampeding herd to run on water, up the side of a cliff, through canyons too narrow for even a single Brontosausagus to fit through, or even run off a cliff without falling. As you might guess, seeing a herd of these big guys running on thin air is a sure fire Boggle.

Compignathus

These are very small swineosaurs, being only about 3' long and a foot tall. They are meat eaters, but won't bother most characters unless they decide to follow them around to eat scraps of food from their lunches. It is probably a bad idea to threaten a Compignathus that is following you, because he might just go tell a Tyrannoboarus or a pack of Velociporkers where to find you. Then he will eat the scraps from **THEIR** lunch.

Compignathus has one weakness. . . they love to dance. Depending upon the music being played, they will square dance, waltz, do the disco boogie or even dance ballet. Crafty PCs will try to get them to dance off a cliff or into a tarpit or something. Stupid PCs might forget themselves and start dancing with the Compignathus. This won't cause any damage, but it will waste time and make the dancing PC look pretty dumb.

Triceraporkchops

Another plant eater, Triceroporkchops is also one of most dangerous. They weigh 8 tons, are up to 30' long and have three big horns as well as a big bony neck shield. An attacking Triceroporkchops does 4D of Shishkabobbed By Horns damage and 3D+1 of Trampled Into A Pulp damage. They do not like Tyrannoboarus at all and will attack them on sight. This all goes back to them calling each other "Tiny Arms" and "Horn Face" in kindergarten. Triceroporkchops isn't very smart, so a character might Fast-Talk it into doing all sorts of things. You'd just better hope it doesn't make a successful Resist Fast-Talk roll, because they **HATE** being conned.

Triceroporkchops can run at a speed of 9, but they have trouble stopping quickly. They tend to trip and stumble and roll over a few times before they stop. Any character riding one will soon find this out. Then they will take 2D+2 of Caught In A Swineosaur Crash damage.

Carnoporkus

Carnoporkus is a meat eating swineosaur that is smaller than tyrannoboarus, but faster (Speed 10). It has two small horns on its head and its hide is covered in bony lumps. The other swineosaurs have nicknamed them "Lumpies" because of this. Carnoporkus is not too happy with that nickname, but it beats being called "Hornhead" or "Bony." Carnoporkus has a flatter face and even smaller arms than Tyrannoboarus, but don't kid them about it or you'll get bitten. Their bite does 2D-1 of Bite A Big Chunk Out Of You damage.

Carnoporkus have always been jealous of both Tyrannoboarus and Velociporkers. As a result of this, they can easily be convinced to fight them. Unfortunately, the Tyrannoboarus and the Velociporkers almost always beat the tar out of Carnoporkus. Once that happens, Carnoporkus comes looking for the people who talked it into fighting.

Stegopigus

This swineosaur is one of the strangest looking swineosaurs. It has a very small head, an armored body, big armor plates sticking up along its spine and a long tail with four sharp spikes on the end of it. It can get up to 30 feet long. Because of all those armor plates and spikes, it is a really bad idea to try riding a Stegopigus. This won't stop most

Toon characters from doing it, but we thought we ought to mention it anyway. Stegopigus is a plant-eater, but with all that armor and those tail spikes, he's not an herbivore to mess with. They are normally pretty peaceful, probably because their brain is only the size of a ping pong ball. *Toon* characters are not advised to ask these swineosaurs any really complex questions. In fact, don't ask any simple questions, either.

Stegopigus live in small family groups of 4 to 8 individuals. Due to being so stupid, Stegopigus families often get into arguments about really dumb things. PCs should never take sides in these arguments, since it could result in half the family whacking them with those big spiked tails for 3D+1 of Whacked Real Good With A Big Spiked Tail damage.

Pigodactyl

Of all the flying swineosaurs, this is the best known. They are 3 feet long and have an 8 foot wingspan. Pigodactyls have long necks, short tails and long beaks full of teeth. Although they aren't big enough to really do much damage to large creatures, Pigodactyls are known to drop things onto the heads of other swineosaurs and *Toon* PCs. Their favorite thing to drop are coconuts, which they can carry two of at a time. Coconuts do 1D+1 of Konked On The Head By A Coconut damage. Pigodactyls often fly in flocks of 10 or more. That's alot of coconut dropping potential.

Pigodactyls can be distracted from their coconut-dropping ways if the PCs leave shiny objects on the ground for them to find. Pigodactyls just love shiny objects. Pigodactyl nests are often decorated with all sorts of shiny objects like coins, broken glass, mirrors, bits of armor from Fallen Down PCs, diamonds, gold and pieces of aluminum foil.

Anklyoporkus

While other swineosaurs might have **SOME** armor on certain parts of their bodies, Anklyoporkus has spikey armor everywhere! And a great big club on its tail which does 2D+2 Knocked Outta The Ballpark damage if it hits you. Heck, just backing into one of those spikes does 3 points of Punctured Posterior damage. Anklyoporkus can grow to 30 feet long and stand over 6 feet tall at the hips. Fortunately for *Toon* characters, Anklyoporkus is a plant eater and is very peaceful. It's easy to be peaceful when you are that well armored.

You could probably ride one, but all of those body spikes would make it a pretty rough ride. Smart characters might teach an Anklyoporkus how to use its tail to bat boulders at oncoming carnosaurs. Who knows what the not so smart characters might teach it to do.

Swineosaur Adventure Seeds

Jurassic Pork

A group of characters visit an island theme park where cloned swineosaurs are kept in nice safe cages. That is, until the power goes out and the hungry angry swineosaurs who didn't much care for being caged up get loose. Then comes the running and the screaming and the cream pies and the boggling.

1,000,000 Years BT (Before *Toon*)

The PCs are cavemen who spend their days hunting small animals, marvelling at fire and running like heck from hungry carnosaurs. Actually, they also spend a good deal of time running from grumpy herbivores, too. That is, until the volcanos erupt and the earthquakes start. Then **EVERYONE** runs, usually off a cliff.

The Really Lost World

In the darkest depths of Canada (hey, we said it was **REALLY** lost, didn't we?) a group of daring and not too bright explorers go searching for a land where swineosaurs still exist. After climbing to the top of a 5,000 foot tall plateau

(which each character should fall off of at least once) they find a prehysteric land unknown to the outside world. And then, while they are considering the possibilities for developing this place as a vacation resort, the swineosaurs attack. Insert running and screaming and boggling here.

King Konk

On an island in the South Pacific lives King Konk, a 60 foot tall gorilla. A group of PCs come to film and maybe even capture him. All they need to do is get past angry natives, hungry swineosaurs, bug infested jungles, spooky swamps and King Konk himself. Sounds like there'll be more running and screaming and boggling, doesn't it? Monkey and/or banana jokes optional. Angry 60 foot tall ape guaranteed.

Swineotopia

No angry swineosaurs here! In this world, they live peacefully with other *Toon* characters. Instead of running and screaming and boggling, there will just be the usual *Toon*ish shenanigans. Come to think of it, **THOSE** often cause running and screaming and boggling, too. Guess you just can't escape it.

A Long Strange Trip: The Life of a Weirdness Magnet

by Joel Sparks

Art by Phil Foglio

The Weirdness Magnet disadvantage (p. CI100) can add spice and humor to a *GURPS* campaign. It's also a great adventure hook; there's nothing like the impossible to jolt players out of a rut. But it can be hard on overworked GMs to come up with sufficiently oddball occurrences on the spur of the moment. Many ideas will be trivial (unexplained stains on the clothes), too silly (a movie star appears out of thin air to give the character a big kiss), or disturbing to the campaign (the character solves important mysteries due to supernatural advice). Incidents of Weirdness should be unusual enough to provide amusement and inconvenience, but not so significant as to change the course of events -- unless the GM wants them to.

This article provides guidelines and incidents that can be used as-is in any *GURPS* setting, or as inspiration for other appropriately weird ideas. The character with the Weirdness Magnet disadvantage is called "the Magnet."

Rest Them Bones!

First, some guidelines for day-to-day play.

1. Never roll for a random party member for anything, good or bad. It happens to the Magnet. (If there's a good reason why it should happen to someone else, it shouldn't be left to the dice anyway.)
2. Instead of rolling, try making up results whenever the Magnet gets (or is subject to) a critical success or failure. For example, tie all magical backfires in the Magnet's life together with a theme. Choose a semi-random noun ("toad," "zinc dust," "trumpet blast") and substitute that for the appropriate noun in the backfire result. For more mundane criticals, use the same result every time on every chart, good and bad. Or have the character break four swords in a row in exactly the same oddly jagged, star-shaped pattern. What can it mean?
3. Supernatural entities (ghosts, demons, psionic aliens) may concentrate all attentions on the Magnet: attacks, communications from beyond, whatever. Or they may deal only with others, pretending that the Magnet isn't even there. If the GM has no preference, roll a d6: on a 1-4, they give exclusive attention; on a 5-6, they ignore the Magnet completely.

Dear Diary. . .

When the GM chooses to insert a new peculiar experience for the Weirdness Magnet in his campaign, a few simple rules should be followed.

- **Make it unexpected.** Instances of weirdness do not have to relate to the ongoing events and purposes of the campaign. Mysterious forces are focusing on the Weirdness Magnet all the time, and they have nothing to do with the mundane world. Weirdness is what happens to

you while you're making other plans.

- **Make it impossible.** The Magnet should be left shaking his head and saying, "This could only happen to me," while those around him can tell that something's not right. A run of luck at blackjack is not weirdness; drawing the Ace of Spades in every hand for a week is another story.
- **Make it inconvenient.** The circumstances should be a mild obstacle to the character's goals, with no advantage to be gained: a distraction. If the results of the weirdness can somehow be of use to the party, the inconvenience level can be much higher. The escaped superchimp who fell into your convertible knows how to operate time gates, but the FBI has mounted a full-blown primate-hunt.
- **Make it fraught with portent.** All the weird events in the Magnet's life form a pattern, but he can never quite make it out. Someone or something out there knows more about him than he ever will, and these events are hints and glimpses into a higher purpose.

Nine examples follow. They are in roughly increasing order of weirdness; the GM must choose those which are right for the tone of the campaign. Incidents can be adapted to happen repeatedly, or be impossible to reproduce -- whichever will confuse the players most. These events can be tossed in for comic relief, or stretched into a whole play session, as the GM sees fit.

1. The PCs return to their inn, and termites have utterly devoured every wooden object in the Magnet's room, leaving the rest of the building untouched.
2. The first time the party arrives in a new town or culture, they walk into a normal social situation. Immediately, a number of NPCs spot the Magnet and gravely turn and leave, saying nothing and ignoring all pleas and comments. This can range from a single beggar or shopkeeper, ceasing to do business with the party once he realizes "who he's dealing with," to an entire gala ball coming to a stop, all of society's cream turning a cold shoulder and shuffling away in icy silence, leaving an empty hall. The same NPCs, encountered later, will be perfectly friendly and politely ignore any reference to their previous behavior.
3. A well-known local bum drunkenly presses the Magnet to receive some object "for safekeeping." The object is totally ordinary: a cracked wooden mug, a torn poster for a circus several years ago, a single stained sandal. Within 24 hours, four humorless men in black clothes accost the Magnet, tersely demand the item, and leave with it, never to be seen again. If these men are resisted, they exchange meaningful glances and retreat; a few days later the item is simply missing. If questioned later, the bum claims not to remember the item at all.
4. The water in one well, or one building, causes the Magnet to have wild and incapacitating hallucinations for 1d6 hours. It never affects anyone else. If the GM so desires, a successful skill roll may find useful information in the visions; try Oneiromancy (Divination, p. M48) or Psychology (p. B62).
5. On the road, a sparrow flutters down to land on the Magnet's shoulder. If shooed, it resettles right away. If attacked, it leaves. Otherwise, within a few minutes, a couple more birds fly up and land on the Magnet. Within fifteen minutes there will be about 30 birds flocking around the Magnet, fighting for position on his shoulders and head, squawking and occasionally defecating. If the Magnet is attacked during this time, the birds will defend him as a Swarm [Bird Swarm: Move 8, Damage 1d-2, DR protects normally, dispersed by 8 hits. See p. B143.] After an hour and a half, the birds begin to disperse, and soon all are gone.
6. If the Magnet ever spends any time drinking or studying the Carousing skill, he eventually experiences a total blackout bender lasting two nights and three days. Tell the other players that they have no idea where he is during this time, and make it inconvenient, like the day before they have to leave on a mission. On awakening, or being found passed out in a flophouse on the edge of town, the Magnet has a new tattoo: a two-inch wide crude human eyeball on the palm of the right hand. The tattoo is painful for a few days, but otherwise has no

effect. It is very difficult to remove. Should the Magnet later encounter a primitive or alien people, they will notice the tattoo and treat him as the Chosen One. Whether that means lifelong worship or rapid ritual sacrifice is up to the GM, but it will certainly mean a radical and unexpected change in the way the Magnet and his associates are treated. Attempts to duplicate the tattoo are useless -- people who care about it can tell the original from even an excellent fake.

7. There is one dangerous and powerful artifact (magical or superscience) that has no effect of any kind on the Magnet. Perhaps only he can safely handle some greatly evil or destructive totem; perhaps a weapon of fierce power can be safely ignored. Certain sages, historians and religious societies are interested in the artifact and can discover that the Magnet is immune. They may want him to carry the object to its destruction, or wield it in conflicts that he can never understand, or lead an assault on the person who currently controls the object. Or they may want him eliminated to prevent others from using his unique status. If the object is destroyed or recovered for the "forces of good" (whoever that may be), its power will be turned to good, granting a one-time boon to all present who helped recover it -- a boon to which the Magnet is also immune.

8. The Magnet is introduced to some powerful person who is normally unapproachable and surrounded by lackeys. This may be a celebrity, respected scholar, court official, ruling noble, archmage, etc. The personage seems to recognize the Magnet and tries to take him aside for a moment, offering a cryptic signal or complicated handshake. He says, "I didn't expect to see you. How did everything turn out?" When the Magnet betrays ignorance of the topic under discussion (very soon, barring a series of excellent Fast-Talk rolls), the personage looks slightly peeved or embarrassed and says "I'm sorry, I mistook you for someone else." Then he rapidly retreats to a safe and permanent social distance. He may be heard to mutter, "I guess that hasn't happened yet," or, "Damned replicants."

9. Finally, for the silliest campaigns: In the depths of the most ancient and improbably magical "dungeon" in the land, the party comes upon a giant rusty knife switch, firmly set into a flow of stone that looks older than any works of Man. Even the strongest cannot move the switch. However, the Magnet can loosen it with a little effort. As soon as contact is broken, the Magnet sees everyone else in the party, and all of their surroundings, vanish. The Magnet is naked and alone on a flat and arid desert plain devoid of people, plants, animals, buildings or noticeable geography. A hot wind blows. It is a no-mana zone. The switch and its outcropping of rock are still present. In the extreme distance are a few other tiny figures; a formation of three dots moves through the cloudless air at high altitude, trailing faint rainbows. The instant the switch is returned to the closed position, the world comes back. If the Magnet does not do this within 15 minutes, a flight of angels lands, stuns the character with a blow, plants his feet firmly back at the switch, and, using his hand, flips the switch back. To everyone else, no time has passed; it will appear that the Magnet was unable to move the switch. If he was struck, it will appear that he staggered back from an unseen shock while trying to move the switch, taking 1 point of damage and being stunned. If the Magnet changed position significantly, it seems as if he grabbed the switch and was knocked back right out of his clothes! There is no way to move the switch's location and nothing useful to encounter while "outside the world."

Someone's Stolen the Mayor's Kitten!

by Steven Marsh

Art by Derek Stevens

Do your adventures have the same wacky feel of *The Shining*? Does the phrase "caked with blood" enter your descriptions a little too often? Does your ***Changeling*** campaign capture the whimsy and humor of ***Call of Cthulhu***?

Friend, do you need mirth?

Although many RPGs recommend running humorous adventures, either as a break from seriousness or as a campaign itself, few rulebooks give any concrete advice for how to do this. Unfortunately, it seems most games presume you already know how to be funny or haven't the foggiest idea, and nothing they can offer will help.

Wrong. Although there is no magic formula for humor, there are "shortcuts" which can make it easier for someone without a flamboyant sense of humor to still run amusing adventures. Here, then, is some advice for prospective mirth-masters for how to amuse in an otherwise serious setting.

Don't let on it's supposed to be funny before the game begins.

If you prepare your players by saying, "Okay, guys & gals, in tonight's adventure you're going to laugh, laugh, laugh," they are going to be detached from the action, waiting for the funny bits. (Think of that unfunny guy who prefaces every joke with, "Wait 'til you hear this one. It'll kill you.") Play the adventure straight-faced, until the moment when things get. . . weird.

Let things get. . . weird.

To make things easier on the players, there should be a definitive moment when it's revealed that this is going to be a less-than-serious adventure. Medieval characters could meet a fortune-teller who gives wildly incorrect advice ("I sense, Mr. Conan, that you are a pacifist. . . with a love of the occult, no?"). Super-heroes could stop a speeding car where the driver is a thief who stole a crash-test dummy (sitting in the front seat). This first encounter, while worth a few chuckles itself, lets the players (and characters) know that they're allowed to laugh. This is important, particularly if only serious adventures have been run before this one.

The PCs should outclass the opposition.

Let's face it: Doom and Despair just aren't very funny. If the Darklord D'Waston will be unleashed from his Umbral prison and destroy the earth, the PCs are unlikely to find the humor in the situation. Much funnier is a goblin that's found a pack of dogs and convinced them to work with it, terrorizing villages. The PCs could easily kill the dogs and destroy the goblin without too much thought, so the players can focus more on what's funny about the situation.

The perceived need for a serious threat is where most "funny" action movies fail. *Howard the Duck*, a none-too-amusing film to begin with, is even unfunnier when a scary-looking demon something-or-other is unleashed. If you must have a serious challenge for the players, but want the adventure to be funny, make sure the threat is amusing. Think *Ghostbusters*: the Stay-Puft Marshmallow Man is so absurd that the danger, while real, is downplayed.

Another alternative is the Wildly Powerful But Mostly Harmless antagonist. Here, the opposition outclasses the PCs, but the opposition isn't out to mutilate the PCs or drop Ebola on Chicago. Omnipotent pranksters, childish tyrants, and villains with annoying powers can all challenge players and allow for amusing situations. Envision Q in his lighter *Star Trek: The Next Generation* episodes. The danger here is in resolving the adventure; how can the players hope to thwart a godling? Or if the godling messes with the characters until he gets bored and leaves them alone, how satisfying will that be to the players?

Complications are funny.

Whatever you do, don't make the adventure straightforward. Let the players think they've got everything figured out. . . then spring something else on them.

Let's expand the goblin example above. When the characters get close to where the goblin's supposed to be, they find some of the dogs the goblin supposedly allied with. They're hungry, but harmless. Then let the PCs find the goblin; it's run out of food to feed the dogs, and has had to lock itself in a house with the dogs howling and lurking outside. The players will probably rescue the sap out of pity. Plenty of humor, if played right.

As always, there can be too much of a good thing, and the complications should usually err on the side of amusement. For example, the PCs are chasing someone arrested for theft (having stolen something amusing. . . like the a movie star's hairpiece). Unbeknownst to the players, the thief has a brother who looks pretty similar to him. . . and he's invited this brother to town in order to take the heat off his theft.

But the thief's brother is a bigamist. . . and one of his wives believes he's trying to get away from her. So when the wife (incorrectly) believes that her husband has stolen the hairpiece, and she steals it back. . . the humor writes itself. ("Ma'am, we don't want any trouble. Put down the toupee, we give you your husband.")

Note that the humor comes from within the framework of the situation; aliens do not suddenly kidnap the husband, for example, nor does the hairpiece suddenly develop magical powers. Keep the situation consistent with the campaign's tones and themes.

Keep the pace fast.

Humor isn't slow; if a scene is dragging, have the phone ring, a villager run up, an ultimatum from Chromaman painted on clouds ("'Fools. You underestamate me.' He misspelled 'underestimate.'"). . . whatever it takes to keep the adventure flowing.

On the other hand, if the players are still amused by a scene, then by all means, let it play out. Even then, don't let it limp along like a *Saturday Night Live* sketch five minutes too long; know when to move it through. A fast pace is also important in order to keep the characters from being able to ponder too much; action is usually funnier than thought.

Know the limitations of your genre.

A ***Call of Cthulhu*** campaign, for example, couldn't run a *Ghostbusters*-type game this week and still be scary next week. But some idiot could break into the characters' library and steal an important book. . . preferably one of the few books incapable of summoning Something Dark. Most horror or cyberpunk campaigns can't get wildly absurd, but could still have the ability to play a perfectly reasonable lighter adventure.

At the other extreme, ***Changeling*** or light-hearted super-hero games can have wildly funny adventures. Goofball

villains, odd thefts, and riddling fairies all form the potential for fun (and funny) adventures.

For other genres, you'll need to figure out what you and your players are willing to accept. Talk to your players honestly about what their expectations are; a renegade Ewok with a lightsaber may amuse one group of players, yet may provoke hostile disbelief in another. Fortunately most players appreciate a change of pace, but it's best to talk beforehand.

Continuity can be funny.

Continuity is one of the most powerful tools a gamemaster has, for both serious and comic adventures. It makes the fictional universe more real for the players; the lack of character-specific continuity is one of the reasons pre-published adventures often feel flat. Players love to feel that what's gone before has long-term consequences.

Write down seemingly insignificant events from your adventures, and use them later. If the PCs give a gold piece to a beggar, write it down; a year later, have a finely-dressed man shadow the (probably paranoid) characters. . . it's the beggar, now a wealthy merchant, hoping to repay the gift with interest. (If goons kidnap the beggar after he meets the PCs, then you've got the beginning of complications, as detailed earlier.) These little facts don't need to be the focus of the story; they can be a side-point or subplot.

The story is still about the characters.

This one's important. Once you have a wacky plot with wacky NPCs, it's easy for the story to get out of control, with the players feeling moot compared to the awesome force of the plot or NPCs. It's even more likely if the Wildly Powerful But Mostly Harmless antagonist is used. Don't let this happen. Remember: even in a comedic story, the focus is not on amusing NPCs or amusing situations; it's about the players' reactions to this weirdness.

Don't make the characters act out of character.

At first glance it may sound fun to force the players into character roles they are unaccustomed to. Avoid this temptation. Don't, for example, have the happy-go-lucky teenager player character get recruited by the army, expecting humor to come from the fact that he now has to act adult and disciplined. The player will probably resent the fact that you've forced this on him.

Someone's Stolen the Mayor's Kitten!

Now, in this same situation, what if the army started trying to recruit the character because of some standardized test he took years ago? Well, that can be funny; the player then gets to interact with army recruiters, and will (in all likelihood) avoid getting recruited, and be amusing in the process.

Likewise, don't force the characters to be funny (unless they are naturally); having the heroes transported to an intergalactic comedy club is asking for trouble, and is a good way to ensure a humorless session.

On the other hand, placing characters into unexpected predicaments is perfectly all right; just let the humor come from the characters reacting the same as they would. For example, on *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, when the entire crew is transported to the world of Robin Hood, the Klingon Worf protests, saying, "I am NOT a merry man!" Likewise, Thog the Barbarian transported to Disney World may attack the evil-looking Rodent God that threatens children. But before Thog kills the innocent bystander, turning the adventure morbid, make sure something happens. . . something funny.

Having said that, feel free to ignore this advice if you think the player would

have fun. For example, if you have a story that would involve the normally
stoic scientist to be hit with one of Cupid's Arrows, turning him into a gushing love fool, ask the player beforehand if he would want to play his character with the affliction. Don't give information that ruins any surprises, but give enough clues so the player can make an informed decision.

Have nonplayer characters act in character.

This is related to the previous rule. It isn't funny to have the stoic President of Globocorp suddenly decide to be a stand-up comedian; the players won't believe it, and the whole scenario will just feel dumb. But if the Klingon warrior starts golfing to improve his wrist strength ("The better to smite enemies with my blade."), that should be within the realm of believability. Amusing, but believable. Likewise, the fat cab driver probably can't realistically start taking ballet lessons, but the meek mailman might ask for advice on writing a poem to a woman he's interested in.

Be careful not to let the quirks of the NPCs overshadow the player characters. But new hobbies, problems, or relations can give your NPCs a richer texture, and give the PCs something new to comment on and discuss.

Relax.

If the adventure isn't as funny as you'd want it to be, don't worry. At worst, the adventure will come off as "odd" to the PCs, and they'll shrug and return to the regularly scheduled gloom and doom of next week. At best, they'll be laughing, both in and out of character, and probably recite catch phrases from the adventure for years to come. Also, don't feel pressured to be funny during the entire adventure; good comedy feels off-kilter, yet natural. Provide the odd situations, let the characters react as they would, and the rest should follow.

* * *

Not everyone can be a writer for the *Tonight Show*, but most GMs should be able to provide lighter adventures for their players. Played as breathers between heavy, serious adventures, or designed as part of an ongoing humorous campaign, humor can be a definite part of gaming. . . and both are about having fun.

28IF -- Steven's Love of April Fool's Day

April Fool's Day is probably my favorite **h**oliday. Th**e** Yu**l**e/Pagan/Wintery holiday? Too commercial. Halloween? Too live-action without the rock-**p**aper-scissors. Thanksg**i**ving? Too gluttonous. No, April Fool's D**a**y is one of the few holidays they haven't corrupted yet. No "Happy April Fool's Day!" cards, no "April Fools! Life Still Stinks, Charlie Brown" specials. Just the **m**essage of April Fool's.

Namely, *keep your eyes open.*

Keep your eyes open. Don't take anything at face value. Dis**b**elieve your surroundings. Think. It's the on**e** hol**i**day whe**n** you're actively encoura**g**ed to question everyt**h**ing you cross, and you're actively punished if you don't.

The message of April Fool's is not "Love one another!" or "Happy thoughts!" It's "We're out to get you if you don't watch out." And, r**e**ally, despite being an optimist, I think that may be more true than not.

This is the ho**l**iday of humor. This is the holi**d**ay of **p**ranks.

Conside**r** 1996. Th**i**s i**s** the year Taco Bell, d**o**ing their part to pay off the **n**ational d**e**bt, bought the Liberty Bell, and **r**enamed it the Taco L**i**berty Bell. Outraged people called to complai**n** to the company, only to be informed that, indeed, it wa**s** a prank.

(And, jus**t** for th**e** record, I think I should point out I am a much bigger fan of hoaxes than pranks. Pranks ha**v**e a c**e**rtain unavoidable streak to them; hoaxes require belief. Unscrewing the tops off someone's salt and pepper **j**ust isn't **a**s funny as **c**onvincing someone that Congress is considering a [law](#) ma**k**ing it illegal to drink and u**s**e the internet, since the inf**o**rmation highway should be **n**o le**s**s safe than real highways.)

At its best, April Fool's Day represents everything I appreciate in this worl**d**: h**u**mor, a**n** askew view of the world, and an attempt to **g**rab humanity by its collectiv**e** Old Navy Denim Jacket and shake vigorously. And I like that.

From the w**o**rld of gami**n**g, it's the **o**ne day when we should appreciate being inquisitive, leaving no stone unturned, and constantly rolling Detect Lies. Hoaxers take what we want to be true, what we **f**ear wil**l** become tru**e**, and what we'd never ima**g**ine, and inc**o**rporates them into the "real world." **S**o do mos**t** of t**h**e best gaming exp**e**riences I've ever had, reall**y**.

For **f**un, do a s**e**arch on the net for "April Fool's" and "hoax**e**s." See what kin**d** of adventure you can come with presuming one of the hoaxes is true. (There have been nu**m**erous books writt**e**n on hoaxes; o**n**e **o**f my favori**t**e for fluff-reading is t**h**e *Big Book of Hoaxes*, part of the "**B**ig Book" series of i**n**fotainment volumes usin**g** comic art.)

So this is our first theme issue. I've **b**asically tried to get everything to revolve aro**u**nd **t**he s**p**irit of th**e** holiday -- oddities, humor, and pu**z**zles -- and I hope you li**k**e i**t**. Spec**i**al thank**s** go out to everyo**n**e wh**o** made some of **t**he fiddly **b**its possible (James, Phil, Keith, and others I'm s**u**re I'm **f**orgetting). And, as ever, **f**eel free to send me an**y** [comments](#).

* * *

Because YOU demanded it! (And by "you," I really mean, "Adam.")

In last week's column, I alluded to "The Canada Incident." Well, this was an offshoot of the first *Torg* adventure I ran. Perhaps, in hindsight, I should have taken this incident as a harbinger of doom. But I didn't.

Anyway, for those of you who have played *Torg*, you know that much of the action revolves around these triangular regions of power that are being contested by the Bad Guys. There are various rules they follow, but one of the important ones is that

these tringular regions usually built off other regions; thus two regions can be back to back along a common edge. Two of the joined regions are in Canada, and through role-playing my poor players learned that, indeed, the regions they were looking for were in Canada.

Unfortunately, I hadn't done a terribly good job at revealing that the Interesting Thing they were looking for was at the connecting point of the two triangles. (i.e. Point A or point B) Thus, instead of narrowing their search down to two points, they had only narrowed it down to. . . near or inside those triangular regions. Unfortunately, each of those triangles is about three hundred miles on a side. So, rather than give them two small locations to check out, I gave them about 80,000 square miles.

At which point, Dennis said (in a voice simulating Fred from Scooby Doo), "Okay! We know where they are. Let's go to Canada and start looking for clues!" The other players joined in. "Yeah! How big could Canada be?" "Great! You search the left side of Canada, I'll go right, and we'll meet back here in ten minutes."

So, in our gaming, "going to Canada and looking for clues" is shorthand for a mystery which requires too much of a leap to complete.

(I really do believe I'm a better GM than these horror stories must make me seem to be. At least, I hope I am.)

-- Steven Marsh
(anagram of Mesh Servent, whatever that means)

* * *

Last week's answer: The underside of the **INWO Booster Pack Box (POP)**.

(one **jillion** *stars)*
"*Supergirl* (Tri-Star Pictures) exists and functions on precisely and exactly the intellectual and artistic level of *Monsignor*.
"This has been a review."

Mysteries of the Obvious -- Explained!

"Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?"
-- Groucho Marx, *You Bet Your Life*

In every mystickal Tradition there is a Question at the heart of Mystery; from "Who serves the Grail?" to "What is the Mason Word?" to "Why has the Bodhi-Dharma left for the West?" But one Mystery, one Question, lurks beneath and hovers above any discussion of the secret governance of America, the hidden lords of shadow whose every whim has become Federal regulation for the past 508 years. The Question hides in plain sight, a veritable byword for an empty riddle. "Pass me by," it seems to say, "Go on about your daily quotidian life unconcerned with the True Mysteries." But it's always worthwhile, when examining a Secret Tradition to ask the Question that They claim is meaningless -- to ask Who is buried in Grant's Tomb.

"The man used by our Government for years and thousands of cases as their 'Doctor' and 'Expert' on remains was a total FRAUD. He was not a 'Doctor' and the techniques used by this FRAUD were derided as unscientific and in the words of one eminent Forensic Anthropologist; 'Disgusting and fraudulent: Voodoo forensics' . . . . The old joke about 'Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?' is no longer funny. Someone in Congress has got to make a stand on this issue. The far reaching ramifications will be felt in the next war. The time is now to act."
-- Maj. Mark Smith (Ret.), "The Remains Charade Is A Fraud"

The question begins with paradox. As a tomb, nobody is buried there -- if Someone (or Something) lies within, they lie above ground; immured but not inhumed. The question, then, takes on a newly important cast of meaninglessness -- not only do we not know that we know Who (or Whom) is buried in Grant's Tomb, we don't even know that we shouldn't know why we don't know. You know? To ask, then, is the point of the question -- and precedes even the first of the Great Tasks of the Magus according to Eliphas Levi, who should know, even though he began the list with "to know." And not to ask. Consider that carefully; not to ask. If we've learned anything so far, we've learned nothing. (To know that you know nothing is the beginning of wisdom, said Socrates, although Eliphas Levi began somewhere entirely different. Paris, in point of fact.) Thus, Somebody (or Something) deep within Grant's Tomb doesn't want us to ask.

"GRANT'S TOMB:
A. Kill everyone.
B. Get Green Pendant.
C. Free Alexander Tennent."
-- walkthrough for *Bloodnet,* from *Codebook 3.0* for the Macintosh

And They cover it well, not only with the scrim of inanity that has made asking the Question a byword for pointlessness, but with other defenses. Consider this: Grant's Tomb was dedicated on April 27, 1897. The occult and mystical pianist and composer Alexander Scriabin died on April 27, 1915, screaming in a madhouse about imaginary tumors killing him (imaginary death -- a proper fate for one linked to a burial that is not a burial). The New York City (Grant's Tomb is traditionally located in New York City) poet Hart Crane (the Crane, of course, being the sacred bird of Hermes, who guides souls to the underworld) suicided on April 27, 1932. Speaking of sacred animals, April 27 is the day of Tyi Wara, the beast-man who brought poetry and learning to Mali -- just as Hermes brought it to Greece, or Thoth (Hermes' twin, whose bird is also a Crane) to Egypt. The web grows tighter, we measure a circle, as Charles Fort hastens to remind us, beginning anywhere, even with "to know" or "in Paris." Phil King of the Blue Oyster Cult died on April 27, 1972 (a Biblical forty years after Crane), and to cap it off -- and to demonstrate that They mean business -- former CIA director William Colby died on April 27, 1996. Is Death itself buried in Grant's Tomb?

"It sounds a jokey, frivolous question, on a par with 'Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?' I mean, Shakespeare wrote Shakespeare, didn't he?"
-- marketing copy, *A Common Reader* catalog

Grant's Tomb follows more than one path back to Hermetism. (Do you feel the spirits of the Merovingian kings

hovering around us as we discuss a Tomb famously findable and famously unfillable -- a mystickal mirror to the Other Tomb, with its famous occupant, now lost? Do you? Why the heck not?) It sits on Riverside Drive -- just as the edge of the afterlife sits on the river's side, the River Styx, itself but one of the rivers of the dead -- the River Lethe conferring forgetfulness, of the type that might make one ask who is buried in Grant's Tomb. William Colby, of course, died on a river side; Hart Crane drowned. Fear death by water.

The cross-street for Grant's Tomb at Riverside is 122nd; 122 being the number of Asmodeus, lord of Hell, demon of the second decanate of Aquarius (water again). Not to mention that 1+2+2 = 5, and the pentagram of magick. 2930 also adds to 5 (2+9+3+0 = 14 and 1+4 =5), and I hardly need to point out that it's hardly coincidence that that number is second baseman Rogers Hornsby's lifetime hitting total. Rogers Hornsby, born exactly one year before Grant's Tomb was dedicated; the mystickal Moonchild prefiguring the sacred Tomb of the Unknown. Hornsby, who played primarily for the St. Louis Cardinals -- another secret hint of a sacred tie to a religious order; and 122nd is also known (near Grant's Tomb) as Seminary. Perhaps the Tomb hints at the Seminary of St.-Sulpice, shadowy executors of the Rennes-le-Chateau decretals. (1/22 also being the date that Cleopatra's Needle rose in Central Park in the palindromic year of 1881.) Did the *Prieuré de Sion* dedicate Grant's Tomb to commemorate the final defeat of the Stuart Bloodline at Culloden, exactly 150 years before Rogers Hornsby's birthday? Does that explain why 150 plus 1434 (the year René d'Anjou, Nautonnier of the *Prieuré,* designed the Cross of Lorraine) equals 1584, the year that John Dee received the 48 Enochian Keys -- and Rogers Hornsby's lifetime RBI total?

"It was a standing joke at the seminary I attended for students to ask one another: 'Who wrote the epistle of Paul to the Hebrews?' It was admittedly weak humor -- on a par with 'Who is buried in Grant's Tomb?' But it served to raise a primary question about Hebrews: *who actually wrote this brilliant treatise on the person and work of Christ that has been a part of our New Testament from the beginning?"*
-- Ray C. Stedman, *Introduction to Hebrews*

But aren't we doing Their work for Them now? Once the *Prieuré* are involved, don't we really know Whose Tomb it is? Again, we approach gingerly, fearing the sound of horns and motors. Rogers Hornsby played one season for the New York Giants (in the earth in those days), in 1927, his only season in New York City, location of Grant's Tomb. 19+27 is 46, the number of Levi, the sacred hereditary priesthood. Grant's Tomb holds a High Priest (perhaps, if it holds one of the Greys from the 1897 Airship, a very high priest indeed) of the *Prieuré,* perhaps the Highest. (Remember; Giants plus Cardinals.) During that year, Hornsby scored 133 runs (the number of the ocean, the ocean that claimed Hart Crane), 26 home runs (A-Z; completeness, the Alpha and Omega), 205 hits (the mountain; earth plus water -- again, the river's side), 125 RBIs (5 (or 1+2+2) cubed, much as 27 is 3 cubed), and maintained a .361 average (361 being "Mount Sion" kabbalistically, revealing the *Prieuré* yet again). It's obvious that They manipulated Rogers Hornsby's entire career, Making Manifest That Which Should Be Hidden, and playing a giant game of misdirection centered squarely (and on the level) upon Grant's Tomb.

"Grant's Tomb is not accessible to the mobility impaired."
-- U.S. Park Service informational pamphlet

An interesting thing about Grant's Tomb. It's made of granite. "Granite," which sounds a lot like -- "Grant." There's one more peculiar tie to the Tomb and to this kabbalistic pattern of simultaneous revelation and concealment that swirls around the Tomb like the interface between water and earth, between life and death, between Rogers Hornsby and Alexander Scriabin. April 27, 1822, was the birthday of a figure still steeped in mystery to this day. He changed his name -- for kabbalistic reasons? We may never know for sure. He was at the center of many vast and interlocking banking conspiracies -- but died penniless. And yet, his picture adorns the fifty dollar bill to this day; fifty being the number associated with the mysterious Annunakim, the precursors of the "giants in the Earth" hinted at by Rogers Hornsby in the year of Glozel and the Crystal Skull, 1927. Could the mysterious Entity within Grant's Tomb, the Sacred Focus of Merovingian kabbalah, the slip point between Making Manifest and What Is Hidden, actually be Ulysses S. Grant, 18th President of the United States of America? If so, it would answer a lot of questions. Or at least one.

Pyramid Review from Dimension X!

Aberrant: Project Utopia

Published by [White Wolf](#)

By Carl Bowen, Steven Long, and Angel McCoy

144 pages, $19.95

(Review by controversial nova Divis Mal, received via encrypted, untraceable Opmail)

No doubt because of my publicly stated belief that novas cannot be held accountable to or judged by the laws and ethical standards of baseline humans, I am often inaccurately portrayed on the OpNet and elsewhere as some sort of "nova supremacist" who holds them in contempt. Nothing could farther from the truth. Indeed, I find baselines and their insatiable curiosity to be of great interest to me. A case in point is *Aberrant: Project Utopia*, a recently published book about the do-gooders of Project Utopia, including the misguided novas who make up Team Tomorrow. While not without its flaws, this little volume provided a plethora of valuable information about the Project - including some of its dirty little secrets.

The book is divided into six chapters plus an appendix; it begins with a rather uninspired piece of short fiction intended, I suppose, to get one into the spirit of the Project's much-vaunted ideals. Considering its brevity, I will overlook its lack of value to me. Chapter 1 is a useful primer on the origin and growth of Project Utopia and, more importantly, Team Tomorrow. The chapter is remarkably well balanced, deriving its information from a variety of news and media sources, not all of whom share the wide eyed awe in which Utopia is held by the less discerning.

Chapter 2 discusses the organizational structure of Project Utopia. All of its branches, from Public Relations to Internal Affairs get a full treatment, allowing the reader to understand the Project's bloated hierarchy. The chapter even highlights the Project's efforts to regulate nova-derived technologies and its self-absorption with licensing concerns. If ever one needed proof that the novas of Utopia had failed to live up to their true potential, one need only read of the value they place on action figures made in their likenesses. Pathetic!

Chapter 3 is a lengthy chapter that details the jewel in Utopia's crown: Team Tomorrow. Portraying these novas as heroes, the chapter discusses their recruitment, training, and placement throughout the world. Naturally, the bulk of the information emphasizes the good these novas have done in the service of mankind. I could hardly contain my disgust as I read these pages. There's even a reproduction of the Team's laughable Code of Honor. While I have little doubt such material will appeal greatly to hero-starved baselines, I found its treatment less than even-handed. In fact, it reads like propaganda of the highest order.

Chapter 4 was far too short. In its brief pages, one can find information on Project Utopia's relationship to other organizations and governments. Again, emphasis is placed on the close and friendly relationship Utopia has with groups (like the United Nations) that share its goals. This is, of course, part of the propaganda fed to novas and baselines alike. Why not bring greater attention to the fear and jealousy novas elicit in the United States, for example? Why not talk more about the secret Directive that seeks to contain the powers of novas? No, to do so would not serve the PR machine that wishes to paint the rosy future Project Utopia has prepared for all of humanity. Truth just gets in the way, after all.

Chapter 5, however, goes some way toward making up for earlier deficiencies. This chapter describes Project Proteus, a secret cabal within Utopia as dedicated to the control and manipulation of novas as any on Earth. Indeed, Proteus is even more sinister due to its existence as an adder in the bosom of Utopia. Not all Utopians know of its true goals or even its general operations. As the chapter explains, though, Proteus seeks nothing less than the maintenance of a status quo in which novas serve baselines for their betterment and no one else's. To that end, Proteus has undertaken numerous insidious plots against novas, including probably the murder of novas who uncover their secret. I can assure you that Proteus will be unmasked, for they pose no threat to me. Perhaps then more novas will realize the truth of my Null Manifesto and abandon their unnatural servitude to baseline laws and morality.

Chapter 6 is clearly intended for use by the media, for it delineates the various types of stories in which Project Utopia novas may take part. Each type includes numerous ideas for plotting and maintaining such stories. I was amazed to see stories revolving around Teragen-sympathetic novas within the Project. I also cannot fail to note that many of the story types adopted a much more morally ambiguous stance toward Utopia than earlier chapters would have indicated. While I have no objection to this approach (and even applaud it), it did strike me as at odds with the fawning approach seen elsewhere.

The appendix to the book describes in some detail important members of Project Utopia, including Team Tomorrow and Project Proteus. The information contained herein is useful, but poorly selected in many cases. It was valuable to provide data on known Proteus operatives, including its vile Director Thetis, but I am saddened to see nothing on such prominent Uncle Tom novas as Shelby "Caestus Pax" Eisenfaust or Spencer "Antaeus" Balmer. These omissions make little sense to me, as I would surmise a reader of this book expects them to be included. Perhaps it is a marketing ploy designed to dupe baselines into buying subsequent volumes in the series with a promise of the missing information.

Nevertheless, *Aberrant: Project Utopia* is a worthwhile purchase - if only to see how the Project portrays itself to baselines and novas too weak to realize their proper place in the universe. If the truth of the Null Manifesto is to be heard, this portrayal must be challenged on all fronts. This volume fails to provide all the information needed to combat it, but it is a small first step to our ultimate victory.

-- Divis Mal (transcribed by James Maliszewski)

Pyramid Review from Dimension X!

Steven --

There appears to be another Phil Reed in the Austin area with an IO account. I've had him forward my mail from his accounts on numerous occasions, have talked to people who searched for me in the phone book and found him, and have even received his mail a few times.

But this is the strangest thing yet.

I thought it was some complex prank.

After forwarding the attached e-mail message to the proper recipient and sending one to my work address where I could show it around, I was promptly visited by what would be more commonly known as "Men in Black." At first I took it to be a joke, a prank pulled on me by some friends, but as the "MIBs" trashed my home and destroyed my new iMac I figured out it wasn't a joke.

I thought you may be interested in the e-mail that started it all.

Please, please DO NOT share this with anyone.

I think they're watching me right now.

(I have included some additional comments after the attached e-mail.)

-- Phil

```
X-Sender: ccampbell@mail.hoffman.fake
Mime-Version: 1.0
Date: Sat, 25 Mar 2000 12:12:50 -0600
To: philreedd@io.com.fake.do.not.use
From: Charles Campbell
Subject: Re: Hoffman Institute Equipment Guide
Status: ULTRA TOP SECRET -- DESTROY AFTER READING
```

In a message dated 3/20/00 2:50:42 PM Pacific Standard Time, philreedd@mail.io.com.fake.do.not.use writes:

<<After an extended stay in the field I wanted to e-mail you regarding the usefulness of the Hoffman Institute Requisition Manual and Guide. I will cover each section of the manual/guide in the following stated comments:>>

It's a good thing you decided to wait until AFTER your field assignment to write this "informal" memo.

<<The information regarding clothing and accessories feels to be a complete waste of three pages in the manual. How many of us do you feel require information on clothing costs and availability?>>

This section may be deemed a "waste" by yourself but many agents without the time or desire to go shopping find having the basics in one easy-to-find and use location a blessing and have thanked me time and again for this.

<<The sections on survival gear, professional gear, and medical gear were very useful during my assignment, and the ease with which gear was delivered to us while in the field was amazing. While some of the more complicated medical gear was useless to most of us, having an MD in the field squad was a great help and when that crash cart arrived we all breathed a little easier. Next time we will take a better supply of medical gear with us so we don't have to worry about using our medical insurance cards (though having the information on such in the manual/guide is a very nice

touch and greatly appreciated).>>

After going over the field report filed by your "medic" I'm not at all surprised you were thankful for the medical supplies. You should consider carrying one of our "monster kits" the next time you go into the field. As you can see in the manual, these are complete tool box setups with everything you should need to combat various monster types (vampires, werewolves, aliens, other unknown, etc.) and having the appropriate kit with your team would have negated the need for the rush delivery of medical gear. Many field agents have reported these kits to be the most useful items in our inventory.

<<Communications & Security, Surveillance, and Information Warfare were all well-presented sections and the gadgets described sounded useful but our team has yet to find a situation where sitting in one place for days on end is necessary. Everyone in our team does use a portable computer and cell phone and these were appreciated pieces of hardware for the Institute to supply us with.>>

Being a clean-up crew, it is no surprise you find the communications and computer gear to be less than necessary. Our more covert agents are continually requisitioning night-vision goggles, cameras, the shotgun and parabolic mikes, and all kinds and types of microtransmitters. And do not forget, your cell phone is for business calls only and is not a secure line. You MUST use a land line only when making a call in which you are forced to describe the situation accurately. The personal calls on your cell phone have been deducted from your pay. Any future improper use of company equipment is grounds for suspension.

<<The weapons and paramilitary equipment sections were especially useful. Never have I seen a better selection of weaponry and useful gear. Covering a wide assortment of close combat weapons, firearms, and accessory after accessory, I feel like a kid looking through the Christmas catalog whenever I start flipping through. An excellent job on these two sections!>>

Thanks. There haven't been many members of assault teams who have been disappointed by the selection available to them. It is rare we fulfill any requisitions for the really heavy stuff (rocket launchers, machine guns, etc.) but it is available if a situation is likely to get very, very nasty.

I have noticed your failure to mention the vehicles and trained animals available for requisition from the Institute. With over 30 vehicles detailed and available and the amount of "customizing" we can do here, I am a little surprised. The next time you're going into what is a potential combat situation requiring heavy firepower, stop by and we'll look into outfitting you with an armored car and some heavy weapons.

Thanks for the notes on the guide. Now get back to work and don't EVER send classified reports through unsecured channels again.

I hope we don't have to "silence" anyone over this . . . again.

Charles Campbell
Outfitting Office of Facilities & Accounts
ccampbell@hoffman.fake

Steven --

I recognized the name Hoffman Institute from the *Dark•Matter* game and was already interested in the game so I at first thought this was a joke (as I already mentioned). After the "incident" at home I went looking for a *Dark•Matter* book to see just how crazy it sounds when I ran across a book labeled *Arms and Equipment Guide*. I bought it and compared it to this e-mail message. The resemblance is scary! The only things in the book not mentioned in the e-mail are sections titled Paranormalia and Alien Equipment.

Paranormalia is a collection of "magical" items written for a gamemaster to include in his game. It's a very short section (only four pages long) and describes twelve different items (my favorite one being the "Hand of Glory" which

is a real hand dunked in wax and turned into a candle . . . just like in the *Hellboy* "Box Full Of Evil" comic from 1999).

Alien Equipment is another section for the gamemaster and was slightly less interesting (and again, only four pages long).

I'm not quite sure how, but it appears Wizards of the Coast has stumbled across some bizarre agency and created a game about them. The focus shift of their *Alternity* game line (which *Dark•Matter* is a part of) is probably a result of those same "MIBs" who destroyed my home and possessions.

With your known desire to collect "dead" games I figured I should warn you off this one. There's a good chance the "MIBs" may visit you if you pick it up. If you do insist on grabbing it (it is a great read and a perfect book if you plan to play this or any other modern conspiracy game). you'll find the necessary information regarding the book after my sig.

-- Philip Reed

Arms & Equipment Guide (for Dark•Matter)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Rich Redman & JD Wiker

96 pages, $18.99

Pyramid Review from Dimension X!

Rascals, Varmints & Critters 2: The Book of Curses

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group, Inc.](#)

Written by John Goff

128 pages, $20.00

Senate transcript excerpt, dated October 11, 1877

Senator Morgan Folder (R, Michigan): . . . and yet, if we truly want to protect our children, why then do we not seek to ban these corrupting publications, like the so-called *Rascals, Varmints, & Critters 2: The Book of Curses*?

No, no, your jeers do not affect me; you forget, I'm from the upper peninsula. Now, let us look at this book for a moment, shall we?

The first fifth of the book is a section they call a No Man's Land, and it consists of three sections. The first is a Neo-Zoology accounting by Dr. Taddeus Washington, which details many of his observations and musings regarding his study of the American West. (I refuse to stoop to the lurid press's "Weird West" moniker for this region.) Although well-written and thorough, it still strikes me as the work of a man who's been in the sun too long.

The second section is entitled "The Unquiet Dead: A Short Treatise," and, despite Dr. Frederick Sutherland's credentials, I'm afraid I cannot help but scoff at his findings. The walking dead, hungering for human flesh and brains? I would laugh at its findings if I weren't afraid that some young boy, like my own son Tommy, might happen across this text and be unable to sleep.

I will not comment on Dr. Alfred Jenson's letter, the third section of this No Man's Land. Suffice it to say the contents propose several. . . interesting. . . theories regarding the unusual reports filtering back from the West, but I cannot pay any more than cursory heed to a man locked in an asylum.

In short, if the works were intended as fiction, I may well be amused and amazed at how effectively they evoke an atmosphere of terror; but as pieces purporting to be fact, I must urge my fellow Senators to act to curtail the publications of presses like this Pinnacle Entertainment Group. To do otherwise would pose a serious threat to our children.

Rebuttal transcript

Senator Colin Grullett (D, New Jersey): I would propose, fellows, that Senator Folder has never been a child. Or, if he has, then he led a sheltered and lonely childhood.

Regardless, I have read the *Book of Curses* to which our good Michigan Senator has seen so fit as to condemn, and I can find nothing particularly objectionable. Oh, certainly I would not read this work to my five-year-old daughter, but the same goes for the President's State of the Union Address. No, the remaining four-fifths of the book (which Senator Folder did not even mention) makes it clear that this work is intended for the purposes of entertainment.

While I will not comment on the validity of the first fifth of the book, the remaining so-called "Marshal's Handbook"

portends to deliver the "real" story behind many of the oddities in the West. And, in so doing, it becomes obvious that this work is intended to be used to spin wild yarns of horrors and monsters.

Like many of the publications of Pinnacle, this work focuses on having fun while providing the grist for good tales to be told. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the book is its tendency to provide many possibilities, of which a story-teller could choose one. . . or several! For example, in the section entitled Paranoia, details are given on five beings that can wear another's form or appear human. . . all of them different, all of them frightening. This variety means that, even if someone is familiar with the basic idea of the story, the listeners can still be surprised by the exact manifestation.

This book should not be condemned; it should be commended for being so thorough! If only some of our own legislation could be such. No, within this book there are sections on Neo-Zoology (new creatures, for those of you not keen on Latin), the walking dead (with many new ideas and surprises), vampires, ghosts, and others. . . all of them with many possibilities so a story-teller doesn't have to tell tales about a boring old sheet-ghost unless he wants to. Also of note are new imaginative horrors supposedly unleashed by modern science. This section ends with a brief table entitled "Normal Critters" that neatly rounds out the book's more mundane usefulness.

The next Marshal's section deals with creatures of horrific legend. . . Dracula, Frankenstein and Springheel Jack, among others. There are surprises here which I won't reveal, but these are powerful horrors intended for story-tellers whose listeners have heard all the tales and need larger threats to be frightened. While much of this section felt familiar and not as fresh as the previous section, it was still enjoyable enough.

The final section deals with lycanthropy and vampirism. It's the smallest of the "Marshal's Handbook" sections, and provides guidelines for story-tellers to use these infections in their stories. Again, this part is not as interesting as the rest of the book, but I'm sure some story-teller somewhere has been wanting to tell a story where the listener turns into a werewolf.

In conclusion -- no, no applause please; my conclusions can last a while -- as a compendium to spur the imagination of story-tellers, it is, indeed, a worthwhile purchase. Sure, I had minor quibbles with the layout: the large typeface that is the earmark of Pinnacle's books about the West, for example, continues to bother me, and I believe a smaller sort size would allow for more of the interesting illustrations or daguerreotypes to give more visual aids; likewise the book's headers are often confusing when the subsections of one topic have the same type size as unrelated later topics. But these quibbles are small compared to the usefulness of the book for story-tellers to spin fanciful horrific tales about what is going on in the weird west.

If Senator Folder is truly concerned about the welfare of his son, he would do well to look at his voting record regarding the War, then count the years 'til his boy can legally hold a gun. No, I argue that ***Rascals, Varmints & Critters 2: The Book of Curses*** is a perfectly fine, fun book, unless the reader has grown up in someplace traumatic or otherwise horrifying. . . like Michigan.

-- *Transcribed by Steven Marsh*

Dork

Tower!

[Dork Tower!](#)

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

by Rik Kershaw-Moore

Art by Paul Kidby

This is a simple adventure intended for four to six *Discworld* Heroes. Although written as a one-shot, it can be easliy incorporated into an existing campaign.

Introduction

Death, the seven-foot tall anthropomorphic representation, has a problem. Last night whilst attending to the duty in Ankh-Morpork, petty thief Osbert Snood (acting on the orders of Nosmo Vermilion) stole Death's sword from his horse Binky. Evil genius and children's entertainer Vermilion intends to use the supernatural sharpness of the sword to cut his way into a small pocket universe located in the catacombs below Ankh-Morpork. Vermilion is aiming high because this pocket universe contains the fabled Swazzle of the Gods, one of the most powerful magical items on the disc. With the Swazzle in his possession, Vermilion intends to declare himself ruler of the entire disc and no one will ever laugh at him again. *Ha ha ha ha!!!!!!*

Of course it isn't as simple as that because, well, Death wants his sword back, preferably in time for the next royal -- er -- abdication, and he has decided on professional help: namely a bunch of Heroes.

The Swazzle of the Gods

Many moons ago when Blind Io wasn't quiet so blind, Hoki had yet to pull that old gag with the exploding mistletoe, and Reg was the God of all round family entertainers, life on the disc was a lot simpler. Mostly this was because of the strange and mystical device called the Swazzle of the Gods. Where it came from no one knew; possibly the creator left it lying around on a beach somewhere next to a half-eaten egg and cress sandwich.

Physically, the Swazzle is nothing more than two small strips of slightly bowed silver held together by linen tape. Attached to the front of Swazzle is a length of string that makes retrieval easier if swallowed.

The power of the Swazzle is the effect it has on people when someone places it in their mouth and talks. The sound produced instantly robs the will from all those in earshot. . . which is why it wasn't a good idea to leave it lying around where a curious God could find it.

In the aftermath, Blind Io demoted Reg to the God of Club Musicians and had Hoki assigned to the Mistletoe section. As for the Swazzle, Blind Io sealed it up in a pocket universe and made sure that the plans were lost. Much later Abraxas the Agnostic learned of the Swazzle and included its hidden location in his book *How to be a God*. This is where Vermilion learned of the Swazzle's existence.

The Adventure Begins

For the Heroes, the adventure begins in the Curry Gardens with a mammoth helping of Klatchian Hot with extra Squishi sauce. The thing about Squishi sauce is that, unless it has been properly prepared, it turns into the highly deadly poison Bloat. Unfortunately, tonight the Squishi chef did not pay attention when he prepared the Heroes' order, and so after the first mouthfuls of the curry things start to go wrong internally-speaking. From this point on, nothing -- not even a stellar HT roll -- can save them. . . except, that is, for the antidote.

As the Heroes start to expand, time seems to slow and from the shadows steps a tall dark cowled figure. The more observant of Heroes might notice that the figure is carrying a huge scythe, and seems to be in need of a decent meal. Give them a moment to contemplate their fate before Death starts speaking in a heavy embarrassed voice.

AH YES, WELL ER THANK YOU FOR BEING AVAILABLE AT ER SHORT NOTICE. I HAVE IF YOU LIKE, WELL NOT TO PUT TOO FINE A POINT ON IT. NO MAYBE NOT. THE THING IS, YOU SEE, WELL IT'S ERM LIKE THIS. SOMETHING TERRIBLY EMBARRASSING HAS HAPPENED. SOMEONE HAS STOLEN MY SWORD.

I WAS ATTENDING TO THE DUTY IN SWEETHEART LANE. THEN SOMEONE TAPS ME ON THE SHOULDER. I TURNED AROUND BUT NO ONE WAS THERE. THEN I NOTICED MY SWORD WAS GONE. I WAS WONDERING IF YOU COULD HELP ME TO RETRIEVE IT.

As an incentive, Death produces the lifetimers of each of your adventurers and plonks them meaningfully on the table in front of them. The fact that there isn't a lot of sand left in the top bulbs ought to make up the Heroes' minds for them. Therefore, once the adventurers have agreed, Death continues.

THANK YOU, I KNEW I COULD COUNT ON YOUR COOPERATION.

Then, reaching into the folds of his robe, Death produces a pair of mirrored spectacles and places them on the table.

I FOUND THESE AT THE CRIME SCENE. I BELIEVE THEY ARE WHAT IS KNOWN IN THE TRADE AS A CLUE. NOW IF YOU WILL EXCUSE ME I HAVE BUSINESS TO ATTEND TO ELSEWHERE. BUT FEAR NOT; I WILL MEET YOU BACK HERE ONCE YOU HAVE THE SWORD IN YOUR HANDS, OR SOONER SHOULD YOU FAIL.

With that, Death glides back into the scenery, the world resumes snaps back into light, and the manager comes rushing over with antidote and apologies.

The Mirrored Glasses

The sunglasses are a pair of spectacles that have been fitted with special mirrored lenses, which allows the wearer to see Octarine, the color of magic. This mean that the wearer can see things others can't -- namely Death -- and from there it should not take a genius to realize that this was how the crook lay in wait for Death. Hanging from one earpiece is a small tag with the words "Another Quality Product from Dibbler Enterprises." This is yet another clue.

Talking With C.M.O.T. Dibbler

C.M.O.T. Dibbler (p. DI87) can be found standing in his office in Sator Square with a tray of sausages around his neck. If questioned he will deny any knowledge of the glasses existence, whilst all the time trying to persuade the Heroes they want a "Sausage-Inna-Bun" using his formidable Fast-Talk and Merchant skills.

If they try physical violence, Dibbler will simply twist out of their grip and vanish into the crowd, leaving the Heroes holding the tray of sausages. Not only will the Watch take a very dim view of this action but Dibbler will send around a Splatter to retrieve his tray.

The fastest way of getting the information they want is bribery, and the level of the bribe (and how persistent the Heroes are) will determine how much information they get.

AM$1 -- The glasses can allow the wearer to see things that do not exist. "To you my friends, AM$10 a pair."

AM$2 -- The glasses are made by his nephew Solstice. They use a special polarized octarian filter to allow people to see things that are not there. "On sale to my most discerning customers for only AM$5 a pair."

AM$3 -- Business has been slow and he has only sold three pairs. The Library up at the University owns one pair, a dwarf assassin called Grimholdt Widebearth has the second whilst the last pair belongs to Osbert Snood of the thieves guild. "Look, and I'm cutting my own throat here, for you only AM$2.5 a pair."

Interviewing the Suspects

For a small fee, say AM$5, Dibbler will let the Heroes have addresses of his three customers, and as an added bonus a copy of the Orang-utan / English dictionary.

The Librarian

The Librarian (p. DI110) is in his study in the University Library in the middle of an extremely delicate operation. He is attempting to reattach the spine back onto a copy of Mobhurst Tulley's *Book of Impractical Magic* which got too close to a copy of Bullfrog's *The Lore of Sortilege*.

Interrupting the Librarian is guaranteed to annoy him, but should anyone offer to help then the atmosphere will soon thaw. If the Heroes manage to engage the Librarian in conversation and explain the purpose of their visit, he will look sadly at them for a moment and mutter a quiet "Ook." Then he brings out the mangled remains of a pair of glasses. What the Librarian actually said was, "I squashed them three days ago." How you communicate that to the Heroes is up to you.

Sir Grimholdt Widebearth XI

Sir Grimholdt Widebearth XI has his offices in Mollygog Street. From these exclusive apartments Widebearth offers his clientele the finest in undead and Troll inhumations at extremely competitive rates. Widebearth will receive the Heroes with all the equanimity of an alumnus of the most famous school for assassins in the whole of the disc. The Dwarf will offer the Heroes drinks and exchange pleasantries while telling them absolutely nothing, since he considers the matter of the purchase of the glasses to be none of their business.

Again, violence in not the answer, since, despite the gentlemanly veneer, Sir Grimholdt is still a dwarf. At the first sign of trouble he will produce an exquisitely sculpted battle-axe from beneath his desk and charge the Heroes. The key to cracking this particular nut is flattery. Sir Grimholdt is vain and if Heroes start seriously to flatter him, the dwarf will reveal that he did, indeed, buy the glasses. He bought them as a business investment as he has been thinking of branching out into the supernatural. If asked about his movements on the night in question, Sir Grimholdt will reply that he was in his chambers all night. Of course, no one would ever doubt his word, and neither should your Heroes.

Sir Grimholdt Widebearth XI

ST 13, **DX** 14, **IQ** 10, **HT** 13

Advantages: Disease Resistant, Damage Resistance, Longevity

Disadvantages: Assassin Code of Honour, Greed, Intolerance Trolls, Reduced Move

Quirks: Always Exceedingly Polite, Punctuates all his sentences with "Eh What?" or similar

Skills: Acrobatics 11, Assassin Lore 14, Axe Throwing 15, Climbing 14, Distilling 9, Knife Throwing 14, Lockpicking 11, Pharmacy 9, Poetry 10, Politics 10, Riding 14, Savoir-Faire 11

Osbert Snood (Deceased)

Snood rents a room at Mrs. Spent's lodging house in Market Street. The Lodging house is a ramshackle .three-story building that has clearly seen better days. The owner, Mrs. Spent is a charming old woman who can squeeze a dollar until it squeaks. She has a face like a wet razor and a mind to match. She will freely talk about Snood, saying that he keeps to himself most of the time and is no trouble to anyone. If they want to go in and search his room, however, it will take a very heavy bribe.

Osbert Snood's room is fastidiously neat. . . except, that is, for the massive pool of blood that has congealed under the single chair. Sitting or, rather, *slumped* on the chair is body of Osbert Snood. His sad-looking face is wearing a startled expression almost as if he can't believe the fact that he's been stabbed through the chest with a large and extremely sharp wooden sausage of the type used by children's entertainers. Balanced on his left hand is a balloon animal, while in his right is a small crushed piece of parchment which reads, "That's the way to do it!!!!!!!!!!"

It should be apparent that the Heroes are dealing with a madman. . . a madman who is clearly not in possession of all his faculties, since how many would-be murderers scratch "If found return to Nosmo Vermilion, Children's Entertainer, 23a Cable Street, Ankh-Morpork" on their murder weapons?

Cable Street

Cable Street is one of the oldest Streets in Ankh-Morpork. Once home to the Cable Street Particulars, it stands above the main underground thoroughfare of the Ankh-Morpork catacombs. Here, below this street, lies the gateway to the pocket universe that contains the Swazzle of the Gods. The main entranceway to the catacombs is via a trapdoor in Shinkicker's Quality Dwarfish Delicatessen.

Arriving in Cable Street, the Heroes are just in time to see Nosmo Vermilion exiting 23a. Vermilion is wearing the standard issue costume for Children's entertainers: a purple stovepipe hat, a red-and-yellow jacket, blue trousers, and bright pink clown boots. Tucked into his belt is a long sword whose naked blade shines with an unearthly blue glow. He is also carrying a handful of his Sausages of Death. If he spots the Heroes, Vermilion will pause long enough to throw a couple of his Sausages before diving into the Delicatessen.

By the time the Heroes get to the shop, Vermilion has opened the trapdoor and descended into the catacombs. His whirlwind passage through the shop has left sun-dried rats and dwarf drop-scones scattered everywhere and the owner cowering behind the counter. The dwarf will scream at the Heroes and demand they do something, all the while pointing at the open trapdoor.

Nosmo Vermilion

ST 11, **DX** 16, **IQ** 10, **HT** 11

Advantages: Absolute Timing, Cool

Disadvantages: Bad Temper, Intolerance - Children, Megalomania, Odious Personal Habit - Makes Balloon Animals

Quirks: Always laughs at his own jokes, Constantly talks in Mr. Punch like phrases such as "That's the way to do it!"

Skills: Juggling 15, Knife / Sausage Throwing 16, Mime 12, Needlecraft 15, Pie Throwing 13, Punch & Judy 10, Running 10, Shortsword 14, Singing 10, Sleight of Hand 13, Stage Magic 15, Stealth 14, Ventriloquism 14

The Sausages of Death -- The Sausages of Death are Vermilion's secret weapons. While they look exactly like the wooden sausages so beloved of children's performers, they are in fact perfectly balanced daggers.

Down Below

From the open trapdoor wafts the foulest smell imaginable. In the dim light of the shop, a set of moss-covered steps lead down into the darkness. Climbing down the steps, the Heroes will find themselves in a huge subterranean cavern. The catacombs that run beneath the city range from street wide chambers to the tiniest of crawl spaces and all points between.

The goal here is to find Vermilion, but it is going to take some time. Settle back, grab any old dungeon map you may have, and let the Heroes get good and lost in the surreal world of the catacombs. Just so things do not get boring, liberally pepper this section with any old encounters you may have. Perhaps the Heroes encounter the Thieves Guild Amateur Speleological Society out on a ramble, or maybe a lost and terrified wizard running from something large, wet and dribbly. Whatever the encounters, they should be surreal and non-lethal.

Eventually, the Heroes will stumble across a cavern from which a strange blue light is shining. The light is long and sword-shaped. Moving in the light from the sword is a human figure, desperately hacking at the cavern wall. It might be possible at this point to sneak up on Vermilion, but anyone who fluffs the roll will find themselves on the wrong end of Death's sword. Remember this is a weapon so sharp that it can carve words into vowels and consonants. If not interrupted, Vermilion will reveal the soap bubble-like wall of the pocket universe that contains the Swazzle of the Gods.

Unfortunately, what no one knows is that the pocket universe is now home to a horde of Things from the Dungeon Dimension (p. DI157). Therefore, the situation can go one of two ways. Either Vermilion is stopped before he open the portal or he opens the way and all Thingness breaks loose. If the later happens, then it is a running battle to shore up the defenses of reality.

Aftermath

With the portal closed, humanity saved, and the sword in their hot sticky hands, the Heroes can safely return to the Curry Gardens where Death is waiting for them. In exchange for the sword, Death will treat them to a slap-up meal before vanishing once more into the background.

Pyramid Review

Raiders, Renegades & Rogues (for Star Trek: Deep Space Nine)

Published by [Last Unicorn Games](#)

Written by Steve Kenson, Robin D. Laws, Steven S. Long, Christian Moore, Rob Vaux

128 pages, $20.00

Raiders, Renegades & Rogues is the new source book from Last Unicorn Games covering the crooks and villains of the *Deep Space Nine RPG* and the dark, shadowy nooks and crannies within which they lurk. Though ostensibly for the *DS9 RPG*, this will be of use in the *Star Trek: the Next Generation RPG*, and of limited use in the classic *Star Trek RPG* also.

Physically this book is well laid out with reasonable line artwork throughout. The best art is the depiction of the book's new equipment, whilst the book's new ships are illustrated with only two pieces, neither of them keyed to the ships and one of which was used to illustrate the Orion smuggler's ship in Last Unicorn's *A Fragile Peace* adventure book. The book also lacks an index.

Raiders, Renegades & Rogues's twelve chapters covers criminals and the criminal life in general before detailing pirates and privateers, piracy and their plunder, thieves and gamblers, mercenaries, bounty hunters and assassins, technology and equipment, vessels, some notable rogues and rogues' havens, the creation of such rogues as characters and a guide to running a rogue campaign.

Each of these chapters is clearly written and examines their subject from every angle. For example, the excellent section on mercenaries, tells you not just how they operate in the *Star Trek* universe, but how one joins a mercenary unit and gains training and employment. Further, it explains how each *Star Trek* government views the employment and use of mercenaries. Throughout the book references are made to individuals and events within *Star Trek* that cry out for further development either by the GM or by Last Unicorn Games.

The equipment chapter not only details weapons like the Varon-T Disruptor and Romulan Sniper Rifle, but a host of different poisons and surveillance and computer infiltration gear as well. These will complement most games, but will work well in an intelligence campaign also.

For the players there is a short chapter on creating crooked characters, which includes the full statistics for the Lurians, Flaxians and Nausicaans, the three NPC races from the *DS9* core rulebook. To my mind this is wasted space as the statistics should have been in the rulebook, and other races mentioned in the book, such as the Miradorn and the Ackamarians covered in their stead.

The selection of templates, overlays, packages, skills, advantages and disadvantages enable the creation of any of the character types in this book. Further, there is plenty of variety in them to produce interesting PCs and NPCs alike and these are an excellent addition to the game.

The final chapter is a guide to running rogues in your game - either as a rogues only campaign, or by integrating them with your *Star Trek* game. The advice given is good, but seems a little short. It is finally backed up with three episode seeds, which should get a GM started for this style of game.

Unfortunately, referees and players looking for details on the infamous Orion Syndicate as advertised are going to be severely disappointed. Snippets of information on the syndicate lace the book, but that is all they are - there is no one section dealing with the Orion Syndicate. We are going to have to just wait for the actual supplement.

In summation, the **Deep Space 9 RPG** provides enough information to allow the use of criminals as player characters and NPCs within a campaign, but any GM or player wanting to explore the seamier side of the **Star Trek** universe will want this book. Had it covered the Orion Syndicate as promised this would have been an indispensable resource for the game, but without this, **Raiders, Renegades & Rogues** is still a solidly useful and well-written source book.

-- Matthew Pook

Primary Sources

Reviews of Gameable Fiction

The Garrett Files, by Glen Cook

Review by Leon Stauffer

The Garrett Files is a series of nine books by Glen Cook starring Garrett. As the sign on his door says, Garrett is an "Investigator" or "Confidential Agent." He's a beer drinking , skirt chasing, wisecracking, hard-bitten detective right out of Chandler. Except that his cases don't just involve mob bosses and assorted criminal lowlifes, he also confronts dead gods, shapeshifters, vampires, sorcerors, killer zombies, ancient curses and amorous ghosts. He makes his home in TunFaire, a fantasy equivalent of New York or Los Angeles that could make a fine setting for a fantasy campaign.

Cook does an excellent job of blending the stereotypes of both the fantasy and tough detective genres. The various nonhuman races are usually close to their fantasy archetypes. But he also makes them work as replacements for the various groups of ethnic immigrants that populate the city streets in most pulp detective stories. So instead of Chinatown and the like, Tun-Faire has Dwarf Fort and so on. Any large city has its bosses; Tun-Faire is run mostly by mages known as Stormwardens and Firelords. All the usual vices of a large city are well represented, but New York has yet to offer High Elven strippers.

Tun-Faire is a truly fascinating place, populated with an amazing number of different races. Besides the standard elves, dwarves, goblins and ogres, there are oddities like the imp-like, flying morCartha or the powerful, slow-dying Loghyr. Humans make up about half the population and since it's their city, they make the rules. Most nonhumans are not citizens, which means mostly that they don't get drafted to fight in the war in the Cantard, a war that has been going on for at least 40 years. This does not endear them to the average human on the street, a problem that shows up particularly later in the series as the war winds down and more veterans start coming home. And apparently all, or at least many, of the races can interbreed, so there are many strange cross-breeds walking the streets. While many of the races will be familiar to most fantasy gamers, Cook often gives them odd twists; for example, ogres have three sexes. And unicorns are carnivorous and very, very nasty.

Caught right in the middle of this stew of races, Garrett tries to make a living, while working as little as possible. When the going gets tough, and it always does, he calls on a number of friends and allies. Chief among them is the Dead Man, a Loghyr who was killed over 400 years ago, but hasn't got around to finishing the business of dying. While he can no longer move, his multiple minds are quite active and highly intelligent. He is also a telepath and telekinetic. . . whether this is magic or something else is never fully explained. For more mobile support, Garret calls on Morley Dotes, a half-elven assassin and vegetarian restaurateur who spends his free time chasing married women (successfully) and betting on water spider races (unsuccessfully). More reliable but no less deadly is Saucerhead Tharpe, a legbreaker and bodyguard noted for his size and dedication to his job far more than his brains. When real muscle is needed, he hires Doris and Marsha, two thirds of a set of triplets with different mothers. They're grolls, twenty foot tall crosses between humans, giants and trolls, and nobody really wants to mess with them if they don't have to. Other characters include Pokey Pigotta, a master of surveillance with so many aliases he was once hired to investigate himself, and Winger, a huge woman who describes herself as a manhunter but will do anything for a chance at more money. Others call her a disaster waiting to happen, but she always seems to survive her bungled

scams.

Garret's adventures to date are recounted in the nine books that make up the series. In *Sweet Silver Blues*, Garrett is hired to find the mysterious heir to a fortune in the middle of the Cantard war zone. With both a fortune in silver and the secrets of a least one spy network at stake, there are a lot of people who have no intention of letting Garret succeed. Back in Tun-Faire, Garrett is hired as an advisor when a Stormwarden's son is kidnapped in *Bitter Gold Hearts*. *Cold Copper Tears* has Garrett caught up in crooked doings in Tun-Faire's religious community. In *Old Tin Sorrows*, Garrett tries to do a favor for his Marine sergeant by protecting his boss from poisoning, but the job turns nasty when the suspects start dying and Garrett keeps seeing a woman nobody else can see. The Book of Shadows is a potent magic device that allows its owner to take on complete new identities. Everyone wants it, but Garrett isn't about to turn it over to anybody he can't trust, which is everybody in *Dread Brass Shadows*. Garrett is hired by the cops in *Red Iron Nights* to solve a serial killer case. But when Garrett cracks the case, the trouble has only started. In *Deadly Quicksilver Lies*, Garrett is hired by a former royal mistress to find her missing daughter. But when a psychopathic transvestite known as the Rainmaker shows up, nobody wants to tangle with him, including most of Garrett's friends. Garrett's strangest case gets him caught up in the machinations of *Petty Pewter Gods* when he becomes a key figure in deciding which of two second rate pantheons gets to keep the smallest temple on the Street of the Gods. And in *Faded Steel Heat*, one of Garrett's friends is target of a protection racket run by a gang of human rightsists and the cops want Garrett to go undercover to keep an eye on them.

There's a lot of things characters could do in or around Tun-Faire. A typical campaign might focus on a team of investigators similar to Garrett. Other possibilities include a military campaign set in the Cantard, gang warfare with the characters as either mobsters or the Watch, or intrigue among the rich and powerful. Almost any adventure suitable to either noir or fantasy could work. A few quick ideas:

- Silver is the fuel that makes magic work. If the characters find a significant amount of it, Tun-Faire's sorcerors are sure to come calling. Not to mention anybody else after a quick buck. . . after all, it is more precious than gold.
- More and more thunder lizards are appearing near the city. Not only is this dangerous for anyone living outside the city, it's also a bit odd since they never used to come so close before. Maybe the party would like to figure out why. Or just make a buck hunting them.
- The Imperial family went into exile a long time ago. But now there are rumors of their return, and they don't intend to come back anywhere but on top. Somebody's hiring an army of mercenaries and they'd like the characters to join.
- Dead whores are turning up all over town. And every one of them has some connection to one of the more respected temples.
- A particularly nasty new drug just hit town. Nobody important would care, except that the children of the powerful have made it their drug of choice, and now they're starting to die. Maybe the party knows a victim. Maybe they just think stopping the dealer is the right thing to do. Or maybe somebody's offering a lot of money to anyone who can save the children of Tun-Faire's rulers.
- One or more of the characters, maybe the whole party, has managed to cross somebody with the clout to get them committed to the insane ward at the Bledsoe Hospital. They need to get out and find out who got them locked up and why.

Whatever direction a campaign in Tun-Faire takes, it's certain to be an exciting time for all involved.

Pyramid Review

[Nobilis RPG](#)

Designed and Written by R. Sean Borgstrom

Art by David Bolak, Alphonse Mucha, Arthur Rakham, William Morris, and Muchner Jugend

206 Pages, $28.00

Nobilis is an RPG that allows characters to take on the role of the *Nobilis*, demi-god level powers that are the protectors and embodiments of one of the fundamental aspects of reality. Complex, unique, and deeply touching, *Nobilis* is one of the most interesting small press RPGs in years.

Giving a brief introduction to the game is difficult, as the setting is rich and complex. Set in the modern day, this game is much like many of the *World of Darkness* games in that it is set in a world much like ours, but filled with magic and terror. The center of this magical world is the Valde Bellum, the 'great war' that all the Imperators (gods) are waging against forces that wish to destroy all of reality. In this war Imperators who would normally hate each other, such as Angels of Heaven and Hell, Gods of the Wild, the Light, the Dark, and stranger gods yet, are forced to fight together to save the totality of creation - all that grows upon the World Ash Yggdrrasil. While these greater gods war in the spirit realms and in places beyond comprehension they form servants, Powers, to see to their business in the mortal world.

These servants of the Imperators are the Player Characters. These powers walk in the world that hides behind the prosaic world of our reality. They are expected to look after their own domain, the aspect of reality that they embody and control, as well as that of their Imperator. They also must stop the Exrucians, those from beyond reality, as well as the Powers of other Imperators who would increase their powers at the cost of the characters' standing and power. The rewards for successful characters are freedom, power, and hope; the penalty for failure is misery beyond death. This, obviously, lends the game to an epic tone and scope, focusing on heroics and failures that shake the very nature of reality itself.

Despite the epic power and potential that the characters have the theme and feel of the game is not on simple might. While it is obvious that characters with this level of power can change the world the true brilliance of the game is the way that it manages to take these celestial force characters and make them deeply, painfully human. Every action the characters take has consequences; every choice they make is difficult. Even more important is the fact that human beings, ordinary mortals, can become the center of the Nobilis' lives by the fact that a human's life can be tied to the Nobilis' Estate through a ritual called the Nettle Rite. If the human dies, or breaks, so does the Noble's power. This leads to a role playing experience that focuses on emotion and humanity as much or more than on power and glory.

Nobilis is one of those games that allows players to stretch their imaginations, to come up with characters epic, Gnostic, mythic, magic and mundane. In many ways it reminds me more of the wilder sides of fantastic literature than any other game. Books like Zelazny's *Jack of Shadows*, or the *Amber* series would fit well into this milieu (in fact this game is in many ways more Amber than Amber). Due to this kind of scope and possibility the game does require a GM with a strong vision of how their game should run and players who are willing to work together cooperatively. However because of the spread of the games universe most of the work will have to be done by the GM, as the book sets out only the basics of the world and leaves specifics in the hands of those running the game. The fact that the

starting point is a world mostly like ours is of some help, but given the ability of the Nobles to create worlds of their own and walk into different times it is only a slight help. In the end only experience in world building and an ability to wing it will see players and gamemasters through.

The game's system is not bad. The mechanic revolves around the use of "Miracle Points," a pool of points that you can spend to do tasks that stretch even the godlike capabilities of Nobles. Basically you add a number of Miracle Points to your base attribute (of which there are only 4) to determine a final score. If the score is high enough you succeed, if not you fail. This gives a greater degree of character control than diceless systems like *Amber*. The problem with the system is that it is barely there. *Nobilis* is not designed for direct confrontation, and it shows. It also requires a lot of control and thought by the Hollyhock God (the fancy word for GM). If you want detailed rules, or rules that are designed with combat in mind then you will go nuts trying to use this system. It is also a system that will work best of those with a good deal of experience role-playing, as newer players will probably get lost.

The single worst thing about the game is that while it is beautifully, poetically written, the information in it is not laid out in a linear form or in solid blocks. Information about Imperators, Powers, and their world is scattered over several chapters, which leads to a great deal of back flipping and cross-referencing. If you really want to run this game you should expect to read the book two of three times in order to get a handle on everything that is going on. Even then you'll probably find yourself looking at the glossary every other page. Luckily the glossary and table of contents are well (almost painfully well) laid out and make this task slightly easier.

Also, as the game is a small press game the book lacks the layout quality that gamers seem to be coming to expect in their books. The layout of the book is nothing that you could not do with Word on your home computer. It is simple two column unjustified text with simple fonts, little formatting, and no borders. Still, some of the very few pieces of art are quite lovely, and all of them are very evocative of the mood of the game.

In conclusion, despite the problems with layout, and the lack of explanation of some issues with the system mechanics, *Nobilis* is a truly wonderful game. Experienced role players looking for a game of modern magic and myth will find that it abounds with originality, emotion, and possibility. If you are looking for a game that simulates the feel of Greek myth placed into modern times, of books like *Gut Symmetries* or *The Sandman* series of comics then I fully recommend *Nobilis*.

-- Bradley Robins

Pyramid Review

6mm Hover Tanks

Produced by [Fortress Figures](#)

Sculpted by Ray T. Edwards

Sample figures painted by Chris Smith

$10 each set

Fortress Figures has just reissued four packs of 1/300th scale hover tanks. These models have been unavailable for several years, and it is very good to see them offered for sale once more. These packs are not the entirety of Fortress' old micro armor line, but they have, in my opinion, chosen to release the best of the packs that were previously available.

All of these miniatures are cast in a kind of gray plastic. This material is very easy to work with; it is slightly flexible, and it can be cut or trimmed very easily with a sharp hobby knife. The plastic does not, however, take acrylic paint very well at all. Acrylics applied directly to the model will bead up and refuse to adhere to the surface of the miniature. Fortunately, a coat of an enamel-based primer will solve this problem completely. Fortress recommends that all of their miniatures be washed in a solution of warm soapy water before they are primed, in order to remove dirt and oil from the surface. The miniatures did, in fact, have a slightly oily feel to them when I first handled them, but this disappeared after they were washed.

Two of the miniatures (the Heavy and the Missile Hover Tanks) require some very minor assembly; epoxy or superglue should be used for this purpose, as plastic modeling glue will not work on this kind of plastic.

EA 001: Heavy Hover Tanks

The Heavy Hover Tanks are two piece models, supplied 10 to a package. The turret is cast separate from the body, but a hole in the base of the turret allows it to be positioned perfectly on the mounting peg located at the rear of the main body. The Heavy Tank is just over one and a quarter inch long, half an inch wide, and just under half an inch high with the turret in place. The turret sports a pair of guns mounted parallel to each other; the right gun is approximately an inch long, almost twice the length of the left one.

The tank is nicely detailed, with sensor domes, lights, and paneling clearly visible, although there are still enough large, smooth areas to allow unit markings to be easily applied. Even the underside of the tank has been detailed with a variety of mechanical bits. The castings are almost entirely free of mold lines, and the only significant piece of sprue was attached to the rear of the turret -- this is will take only a moment to remove. Care should be taken when handling the turret, as the longer gun barrel is rather fragile. The plastic is slightly flexible, but the gun will snap if it is bent too far.

EA 002: Fast Hover Tanks

There are 20 of these one-piece models in each package. This is a small tank, about half an inch square and a quarter of an inch high. The tank carries a large fixed cannon that runs

along the left side of the chassis. In addition, there is what looks like a small machine gun mounted atop the driver's position. Again, plenty of details, including a ladder up the right side for the crew to climb to reach the access hatch.

Some examples of this particular casting have a visible mold line running along the hoverskirt. Perfectionists will need to devote some time with a hobby knife to remove this; however the line is faint enough that this usually isn't necessary.

EA 003: Hover APCs

Once more, there are 20 one-piece models in this package. The simplest of the four designs, the APC is also the tallest at half an inch high. Its other dimensions match those of the Fast Hover Tank. The APC has a sloped front with visible grillwork, a large dome (presumably a sensor system) mounted at the top rear of the hull, and a machine gun mounted atop a blister on the top left of the hull. There is a door on the left side of the APC, and hatches at the rear, through which the passengers can disembark.

This is the most roughly molded of the Hover Tank miniatures. The front detail was miscast on about ¼ of the APCs, and almost all of them needed to have pieces of excess plastic removed from the rear. The rear also evidences some pitting in a number of the models, but this can be easily fixed with a bit of putty. None of the APCs were so miscast as to be unusable.

EA 004:Missile Hover Tanks

The Missile Hover Tanks are based upon the same basic hull as the Heavy Hover Tanks, and like them they come 10 to a pack. This is another two piece model, with the missile as a separate casting. The missile is huge, just as long as the tank itself, and this model should probably be used as an artillery piece. In addition to the missile, this tank is armed with a pair of machine guns -- one each at the front and the rear of the hull.

There are a lot of nice details here. The mechanisms that raise the missile into a firing position are clearly visible, for example, as are the vision slits at the front of the control cabin. The exhaust area of the missile itself required a little bit of work in all of the examples that I have worked with, but only rarely was more than a few seconds with a file required.

* * *

These are all excellent miniatures, and a great way to build up a large force without spending a lot of money. They are very versatile, and can be used in a number of different science fiction gaming systems. They would fit with any of the major of minor powers from Ground Zero Games' Dirtside II, they could be used as new Space Marine or Imperial Guard units in Games Workshop's Epic 40,000 system, or (like me) you could use them in *Ogre Miniatures*. The Hover APC is a perfect GEV-PCs, and the other miniatures can be used as GEV versions of the Heavy Tank, Light Tank, and Cruise Missile Carrier. I have mine painted up as Nihon units, and all I need to do now is find a GEV version of an *Ogre*. . .

-- John Xavier Crimmins

Firebolt

by Joe G. Kushner

Art by Paul H. Way, provided by **Alderac Entertainment Group**

I started off as an honest cop in Crescent City. Sure you say, an honest cop. What next? Politicians that work for the public instead of themselves? Think what you want, but I did a good job. Ask anyone. Johnathan Times did his best. Maybe I was just too new to the whole thing to realize what type of world I was living in. That changed quickly though.

My partner and I never worked with a case involving deltas, and I was glad. Bill had a terrible fear of deltas. "Not natural," he'd mutter into his coffee. Me, I never had any problems with 'em. After all, isn't Delta Prime made up of deltas? Maybe his fear is why he went too far though. . .

We'd been called in to investigate an explosion. Turns out a little girl had some how created a prototype of what looked to be an Armogeddon suit. Unfortunately for her, the power pack was unstable and exploded. She was fine, although a little confused. My partner started ranting and raving about how she was a delta and was going to kill us any second. He lifted his club and began to beat her.

I stood there stunned for a minute. Was this really happening? I tackled him and the girl fled. My partner lay on the ground, frothing over what a fool I was being and how the deltas would crush us all. I thought for sure they'd retire him.

My superiors retired me instead.

Turns out the girl was a delta, a so called gadgeteer, and that the suit of Armogeddon armor she was using had been stolen from a battle site between a local group of Defiants and Delta Prime. Oh sure, my partner's beating of the girl came up, but who could blame him. After all, she was a delta! Who knew what she might do.

It's hard to get work in a city as corrupt as Crescent when you are thrown out of the force. The only types of jobs that I could get, I didn't want. Mob enforcement wasn't my style.

That's when the girl came to see me. Little Sara Parker, not even ten years old, had managed to do some impressive things with the scraps of armor she had. She gave me a gauntlet and a set of goggles and told me what they did. After hooking up with some of the local Defiants, I now have purpose again, and boy, it feels good to really be fighting on the right side this time.

Supporting Cast: Firebolt

Profile

Smarts: 3d6
Area knowledge: Crescent City 4
Computing 2
Disguise 1
Language: English 2

Language: Spanish 1
Security 3
Tactics 2
Speed: 4d6
Dodging 2
Driving: personal vehicle 1
Martial arts: barehanded 2
Martial arts: blade 1
Shooting 4
Stealth 2
Spirit: 3d6
Bravery 1
Perception 2
Persuasion: charm 2
Scrutinize 2
Search 3
Shadowing 3
Strength: 3d6
Climbing 2
Running 1
Swimming 2
Throwing 2
Size: 5
Pace: 9
Delta Points: 3
Quirks: Iron jaw +3, secret identity +/- 0, self-confident +2, Stubborn -2, tough +2, wanted -5
Powers:
Energy Blast: Firebolt's right hand is covered with a specialized gauntlet, a miniaturized flame throw that inflicts
standard Energy Blast damage (5d6) and can also use Blast Punch and Superblast with the appropriate successes.
Nighvision: The goggles Firebolt wears gives him the Nightvision ability without the drawbacks. The goggles also give
Firebolt the Radar trick with extra successes.
Gear: Good false ID papers, Kevlar vest (Armor 10/-), a pair of handcuffs, and $200.

Quote: "Stop in the name of my law!"

Appearance: In his early twenties, he dresses very conservative when not in suit. His blond hair is combed straight
back. In costume, he wears baggy clothes, a long black trench coat and his gauntlet and goggles. He uses spray and gel
to spike his hair up and contact lenses to color his blue eyes emerald green.

Campaign Uses

- Firebolt is a hero without any powers. By changing his background, one of the players could have outfitted him
  with his equipment. If he ever needed repairs, he would have to seek that character out.
- If the GM sticks with the story, then Sara seeks out the characters to help Firebolt, he's being hunted down by
  the Mob for refusing to work for them when he had the chance, and now that he's got power, they want him out
  of the way.
- If the characters are new to Crescent City, Firebolt could be their guide. His time on the force gave him a greater
  understanding of Crescent City than most deltas have.
- Firebolt can be used to bolster the characters' forces when one of the players has to miss a game. From there, he
  may become part of the regular campaign and background.
- GMs can use Firebolt as a model of how to create characters for *Brave New World* that don't follow standard
  power packages or archetypes.

by Stephen Kenson

Art by Derek Stevens and Dan Carrol, colored by Phil Reed

It's the dawn of the 26th century and humanity has spread out into the stars, establishing powerful stellar nations that rule the destiny of thousands of worlds. After two terrible wars between these titanic powers, there is finally peace, albeit an uneasy one. Once again, the stellar nations are turning their attention towards new frontiers, and opportunities await those daring enough to travel into the unknown.

About Alternity and Star*Drive

Alternity is TSR's science fiction roleplaying game, published in 1998. The *Alternity* RPG serves as a game engine for science fiction settings of all kinds, much in the same way *Dungeons & Dragons* serves as a game engine for fantasy settings of all kinds. The core rules of the *Alternity* game are found in the *Alternity Player's Handbook* and the *Alternity Gamemaster's Guide*.

*Star*Drive*, also published in 1998, is the first campaign setting for *Alternity*. It describes the dawn of the 26th century and the stellar nations founded by humanity. Its focus is on the Verge, a relatively new frontier on the edge of known space. It offers a vast space-opera universe for heroes to explore and adventure in.

Although designed for use with *Alternity*, the *Star*Drive* setting works perfectly well with any science fiction game system, including *GURPS*.

A Brief History of the Galaxy

By the early 22nd century, humanity expanded throughout the solar system. Colonies and bases were established on other planets, and fusion-powered ships traveled between them. On July 17, 2124, humanity made first contact with an alien species. . . or, more correctly, they made contact with us.

The fraal were interstellar wanderers, who'd long since lost track of their original home world. They traveled the galaxy in vast city-ships, moving at slower than light speeds. Attempts to contact humans a thousand years before resulted in many human legends, but little else, so the fraal lurked at the edge of the Sol system for centuries, watching for signs that humanity had improved. When humans moved out into the solar system in force, the fraal tried again. The second contact was more successful. The two races entered into a working

partnership, trading technology and information.

A combination of human mass-reactor technology and fraal gravitic technology resulted in the discovery of the stardrive in 2160. With the first stardrives, explorers traveled to nearby star systems, and the race for the stars was on. By 2250 the Terran Empire claimed a thousand different colonies, but lacked the power necessary to truly govern them. The new colonial governments chaffed under the control of the Empire for decades.

Finally, in 2298, the Thuldan colonies seceded and formed the Thuldan Empire. This set off a wave of secessionist fever, and other colonial governments followed suit. The Terran Empire sent military forces to suppress these uprisings and the First Galactic War began. It ended in 2312 with the signing of the Treaty of Earth, which recognized the sovereign rights of the former colonies and formed the Union of Sol to replace the now-extinct Terran Empire.

For the next thirty or so years, the new stellar nations consolidated their power, explored and claimed new territory, and kept a close eye on their neighbors. One region in particular received considerable attention. Known as the Verge, it was a large concentration of stars outside settled space, on the edge of the Orion Arm. Numerous colonies and settlements were established there.

Then, in 2346, an uprising of mutants on Tau Ceti in the Union of Sol set off the Second Galactic War. GW2 was long, bitter, and bloody, lasting over 100 years and dragging in all the stellar nations before it was over. Finally, several of the stellar nations realized the war could not continue. Sooner of later it would destroy all civilization. These leaders met in secret and forged the foundations of what would become the Treaty of Concord. Signed in the Orion League in 2472, the treaty established a neutral nation, the Galactic Concord, to act as arbitrator, peacekeeper, and watchdog over the twelve stellar nations that survived the war. The Concord has proven a success thus far.

In 2496, the Stellar Ring reestablished contact with the Verge after nearly a century of silence. Cut off from the core worlds during the war, the Verge colonies had to survive on their own. Now the new Galactic Concord moved in to help re-integrate the Verge back into civilization. Some Vergers welcomed them with open arms, while others remain suspicious of the new "arrivers."

Now, in 2502, the Concord struggles to maintain the peace and aid the worlds of the Verge while the stellar nations work to further their own agendas, both openly and behind the scenes. The Verge is a focus for all these activities, with limitless opportunities for those willing to take the risks.

The Stellar Nations

The settled region of space known as the Stellar Ring extends in a radius of some 1,000 light years from Sol. Old

Space is the region within 200 light years of the mother-world, containing the oldest settled worlds of humanity, some of them almost entirely covered in giant cities. Outside Old Space lies the second-generation colony worlds, followed third-world planets and new colonies.

The Stellar Ring also contains the homeworlds of four alien species discovered by humanity: the Mechalus, the Sesheyans, the T'sa, and the Weren. Each of these species, with the exception of the t'sa, had not left their own star system when humanity encountered them. They have, for the most part, been incorporated into the society of the stellar nation that claims the space around their home system.

The Stellar Ring is divided between twelve stellar nations. The Galactic Concord claims and maintains three regions of the Ring, designated Concord Prime, Concord Taurus, and Concord Sagittarius.

Austin-Ontis Unlimited is a combination interstellar corporation and rough-and-tumble frontier. The nation is best known for its arms-trade business, which remains brisk even since the Treaty of Concord. The Austins themselves are a bit gun-happy, and affirm weapon ownership as a vital right.

The Borealis Republic would prefer to stay out of conflicts in the stellar ring. The Borealins are a nation of thinkers, artists, and romantics. They are renowned for their education and knowledge. They are also well known for their cloning technology, half the Borealin population is made up of clones from some 100 "elite" genomes.

The Hatire Community is a nation that denies the value of technology on the one hand, while employing it to sustain themselves. The Community is a theocracy based on worship of the Cosimir, an alien deity. The Brethren focus on human achievement, and disdain technology that alters the human body, claiming it also corrupts the spirit.

Insight was originally a division of the powerful VoidCorp before it seceded and went its own way. Insight originally served as the corporation's Grid programming division, and Inseers still produce the most advanced computer hardware and software in the Stellar Ring. The Grid and virtual reality actually forms the basis of their religion, which seeks enlightenment in pure intellect.

The Nariac Domain calls for equality and opportunity for all people. It has taken up the age-old cause of "the workers" and seeks to maintain a society of complete equality. One of the ways it does so is through cyber-implants to monitor the populace. The Nariacs make considerable use of other cyberware and robots.

Formed by several former stellar nations, the Orion League represents a broad heritage. Orions retain their desire for independence and individuality, and strongly support the Concord as a means of maintaining it.

The Orlamu Theocracy was founded by one of the scientists involved with the development of the stardrive. He claimed to have a vision while traveling through drivespace, a revelation that drivespace is in fact the Divine Unconscious, the mind of God. The Orlamu faith embraces science as a path to understanding, and their knowledge of drivespace and stardrive technology is second to none.

The Rigunmor Star Consortium maintains the equality of all people, and their right to pursue profit. The nation holds profit and financial gain up as the highest goals, and its citizens are well known traders and deal-makers.

The StarMech Collective develops advanced technologies for the combined goals of profit and the pleasures it brings. They rely heavily on robots and similar technologies, freeing the people to think, plan, and party. They balance technical brilliance with a tendency towards hedonism.

Instigator of the First Galactic War, the Thuldan Empire remains a galactic powerhouse. The Empire rests on a vision of "advancing" humanity through eugenics and their medical and genetic technologies remain the best in the Stellar Ring. The Empire seeks to unite all human civilization under their guidance, and have no doubts that they will eventually succeed.

The Union of Sol sits at the center of the Stellar Ring, the cradle of humankind. Solars tend to view themselves as the cultural center of civilization as well as the physical center. They are known equally well for their love and

preservation of old cultures and environments and their arrogance as the "oldest nation" in old space.

The watchword of VoidCorp is order, and the star-spanning megacorporation maintains a complex bureaucracy to control every level of its culture. Advancement through the ranks is uppermost in the mind of every employee (citizen) of the nation, and VoidCorp is known for its ruthless business practices, which make it the most powerful corporation in the Stellar Ring.

Between and above these nations stands the Galactic Concord, charged with keeping the peace and furthering the cause of civilization. The Concord's task is not an easy one, but it is aided by the vast resources of the Galactic Bank, and backed up by the Star Force, the Concord Defense Corps, and the Concord Marines.

The Verge

The Verge is a large concentration of star systems near the edge of the Orion Arm, hundreds of light years from the Stellar Ring. It is home to some 5 billion sentients, cut off from Old Space for 100 years during GW2. Many Verge worlds value their independence and welcomed the stellar nations back into the Verge with mixed emotions. While their old patrons brought new technology and resources, they also brought with them their political conflicts and intrigue. A strong separatist movement encourages independence from the Stellar Ring.

The Verge is something of a cause celebre for the Galactic Concord, the first real test of the Concord's ability to get the other stellar nations to cooperate. In many ways, the Verge is a micocosm of the forces at work back in the Stellar Ring. Concord vessels, like the massive Lighthouse, travel the Verge and assist in resolving disputes between worlds and factions.

The Verge also faces challenges in the form of new species. Known collectively as "externals," these races come from outside known space. They include the Klicks, insectoids responsible for the destruction of the Silver Bell colony at Hammer's Star; and the Kroath, mysterious raiders known to attack ships in the Verge. Vergers are willing to accept aid from the Concord Star Force and the other stellar nations against these threats, but so far little is known about their true nature or intentions.

Technology

In *GURPS* terms, the technology of the *Star*Drive* galaxy is roughly Tech Level 10, with some more advanced TL12 gravitic and contragrav technology, courtesy of the fraal.

Stardrive

The technology that enables the existence of interstellar civilization is the stardrive, a combination of human and fraal technology. A powerful mass reactor powers a gravitic inducer, stressing local space enough to tear open a rift between normal space and drivespace. The ship's tachyon emitter establishes a link to the ship's destination, and the vessel "falls" through drivespace towards it. This is known as "starfall" and is accompanied by a bright swirl of multicolored light.

A starfall lasts 121 hours, regardless of the actual distance the ship travels. After this time, passing through the featureless black void of drivespace, the ship makes "starrise" at its destination. Modern astrogation techniques are accurate enough for a vessel to starrise within a few thousand kilometers of a precisely chosen location. After a starfall, a

vessel must wait for two to five days in normal space for its drive systems to recharge.

The distance a starfalling vessel travels is dependent on the power of its stardrive. The most basic stardrive carries a ship up to five light years in a starfall, while the most powerful stardrives, found on the massive fortress ships of the stellar nations, have a range of 50 light years per starfall.

Starfalling ships create resonance waves that propagate through drivespace. Special drivespace detectors can pick up the resonance waves preceding a starfalling ship 11 hours have the ship starfalls. This gives systems warning of incoming ships 110 hours in advance or the ship's starrise. If the vessel is unauthorized or a potential invader, the system has four and a half days to prepare its defenses or call for help.

Maneuver Drives

Most 26th century ships use gravity induction technology for normal space maneuvering. This creates a smooth, reactionless thrust in any direction desired. Treat a gravity drive as TL10 reactionless thrusters. Some less-advanced areas still use fusion powered thrusters for maneuvering.

Weapons & Armor

Most of the TL10 weapons from *GURPS Ultra-Tech* are available in the *Star*Drive* setting. Lasers and stunners are common sidearms. Lower TL slugthrowers are also available. Advanced gravity technology makes weapons like force beams available as well. Masers and X-ray lasers are not available.

Most *Star*Drive* melee weapons are based on gravitic technology. The power cestus is similar to the TL9 power glove, and the gravmace uses gravitic force to deliver crushing blows, adding 1d (2) to the damage of a normal mace. Monowire blades and stun wands are also available.

Reflect and monocrys "softsuit" armor is the most commonplace, with powered armor "bodytanks" available. TL10 reflex armor is unavailable. Deflector belts are also available using gravitic technology, found in belt form as well as amulets, bracers, and similar adornments.

Communications & Sensors

Communications within a star system use mass transceivers, devices that use gravity waves to carry signals, similar to

Ultra-Tech gravity ripple communicators (p. UT37). This makes communication within a star's gravity well virtually instantaneous, but only out to about 100 AU for a typical G-type star.

Interstellar communications rely on drivesats, satellites equipped with a limited stardrive, enough to shift them into drivespace for the transmission and reception of signals. Drivespace signals travel 50 light years in 11 hours, where they are picked up by the receiving drivesat. A message from the heart of Old Space to the edge of the stellar ring takes approximately nine days to traverse the drivesat relays.

Computers

TL10 computer technology is widely available in *Star*Drive*, although AI technology is legally restricted. Most people wear portable TL10 computers as gauntlets, with sensors on the palm area, controls in the fingers and arm, and a holographic display located on the back of the hand. TL11 implant computers also exist, along with interface jacks for accessing other computer systems.

Computers are linked together in a network known as the Grid. Mass transceivers make Grid communications within a single star system effectively instantaneous. Grid communications between systems rely on drivesats and suffer from transmission delays. Virtual reality technology is a common means of Grid access, particularly for those with neural interfaces, and TL10 cyberdecks, known as "gridcasters" manifest a virtual icon of the user, known as a "shadow" in the system. The mechalus and Inseers are particularly adept Grid users and programmers.

Medicine & Biotechnology

The presence of TL10 medical technology has greatly extended human lifespans. Aging rolls begin at 110 and increase at 130 and 150 years old. Many humans life to be 200 or more. Anti-agathic drugs do not exist. Cloning technology exists for reproduction and the production of medical transplant organs, but braintaping technology does not exist.

Genetic engineering can produce variant human (and, to a limited degree, alien) genotypes, commonly known as "mutants." The Mutant Uprising of Tau Ceti left a strong prejudice against mutants in interstellar society. Outside the Thuldan Empire (which uses gengineering extensively), the genetically enhanced have a slight Social Stigma, moreso if they have very obvious alterations. The TL9 enhancements from *GURPS Bio-Tech* are fairly commonly available.

Cybertechnology

Like biomodification, cybertechnology is viewed with some measure of suspicion from most of the stellar nations. TL9 cybertechnology is commonly available, and more advanced cybertech is TL10. Mechalus cybertech is at TL11. The most common cyberware is an interface jack or a computer implant. Prosthetic limbs are also fairly well-known, although not as common as cloned organic replacements. Military and offensive cyberware is, of course, restricted on most worlds.

The Nariac Domain makes regular use of cyberware, including tracer implants to keep track of their population. It is this popular image of cybertech as a means of government control that makes other stellar nations like Austin-Ontis dislike it. The Hatire Community considers cyberware an abomination that pollutes the human spirit.

Psionics

Psionic abilities exist in at least some segment of the population of every known species. The fraal are all telepathic, and most understanding of psionics, or "mindwalking" as they call it, comes from them.

All stellar nations require mindwalkers to register with the government, and psionic aptitude testing during primary school detects 99% of latent mindwalkers. Most nations at least tolerate mindwalkers, while some revere them. The Orlamu Theocracy and the Hatire Community both consider mindwalkers spiritually gifted, and often recruit and train them. Telepathic Hatire "mind knights" are well-known throughout the Stellar Ring. The Nariac Domain requires its

mindwalkers to wear psionic restraining implants, allowing the state to control their abilities.

The following psionic powers and skills from *GURPS Psionics* are available in the *Star*Drive* setting. If desired, the GM can make other powers and skills available by charging a suitable Unusual Background cost (around 10 points is appropriate). A limit of Power 10-12 in any one ability is recommended.

Electrokinesis: Cyberpsi, Lightning, Photokinesis, Surge

ESP: All ESP skills are available.

Healing (the -50% Limitation "psi takes damage when healing another person" is mandatory): Healing , Metabolism Control.

Psychokinesis: All Psychokinesis skills are available.

Telepathy: Emotion Sense, Illusion, Mental Blow, Mind Shield, Mindsword, Psi Sense, Suggest, Telereceive, Telesend.

Psionic detectors exist in the *Star*Drive* setting, as do psionic impeders from Psionics (p. P74), but other forms of psi-tech, including artificial psi-shields, are unknown.

Species

Humanity has encountered a number of alien species over the past five-hundred years, and some of these new species have become members of the galactic community; somewhat against their will, in some cases.

Fraal

The fraal are tall, thin humanoids, with large, dark eyes and delicate facial features. In the 26th century most people realize the fraal were the source of stories about "grays" on pre-space Earth. Fraal are naturally telepathic, and often have other psionic abilities, particularly ESP and telekinesis. For tens of thousands of years, they have traveled through the galaxy aboard vast city-ships, so long that even they do not know the true location of their homeworld. They are a peaceful race, preferring to observe other species, but rarely interfering with them.

Fraal are highly social and prefer the company of other fraal. In fact, extended separation from telepathic contact with others of their race put fraal into a deep depression, and can even drive them insane.

Racial Template [22 points]: Fraal are ST -2 [-20 points], HT -1 [-10 points], IQ +1 [10 points]. They have the racial advantages Extra Fatigue +4 [Only for Psionics -50%, 6 points], Strong Will +2 [8 points] and Telepathy Power 6 [30 points]. They have the racially-learned skills of Telesend and Telereceive at IQ [8 points]. They have the racial disadvantage Telepathic Addiction [-10 points].

Mechalus

The mechalus are humanoids that make extensive use of cyberware. Their gray skin is covered with a fine network of circuitry. "Mechalus" is a human name; their true racial name is Aleerin. They come from the planet Aleer, a small, cold world in Rigunmor space. Earlier in their development, the Aleerins were quite warlike. On their first explorations into space, they encountered another intelligent species in their home system and wiped them out in a terrible war. Out of shock at what they'd done, a reform movement swept Aleer, turning most of the race towards pacifism and away from dangerous, primitive emotions. A small rebel faction advocates a return to their old, warlike ways.

The mechalus are excellent computer programmers and hackers. Their pacifism does not extend to activities in the Grid, although they prefer programs that do as little actual harm to Grid-users as possible.

Racial Template [25 points]: Mechalus are IQ +1 [10 points] and have racial advantages derived from standardized

cyberware. All Mechalus have Combat Reflexes [15 points] and "interface tendrils" that provide an Interface Jack usable with any computer device [10 points]. They have the racially-learned skills of Computer Operation and Computer Programming at IQ [5 points]. Mechalus have Pacifism (self-defense only) [-15 points] as a racial disadvantage.

Sesheyan

The sesheyans were originally primitive arboreal dwellers from the forest moon of Sheya. They were discovered some two hundred years ago by VoidCorp, which arranged a contact placing all sesheyans in the company's service... in perpetuity. In the generations since, the sesheyans have learned the visitors to their world were not gods or spirits, and that they have been unfairly enslaved. Some have chosen to rebel and escape to other worlds.

Sesheyans average 1.5 meters tall, with green skin and six limbs. The upper pair of limbs are arms, the lower pair legs, while the middle pair of limbs is a set of wings, allowing the sesheyans to fly on worlds of 1G or lesser gravity and Earth-normal atmospheric density. Their head is oval-shaped, with eight small eyes, giving them enhanced night vision, but sensitivity to bright light.

Racial Template [20 points]: Sesheyans are ST -2 [-20 points], DX +1 [10 points]. They have the racial advantages Claws [15 points], Flight (Winged) [30 points] and Night Vision [10 points]. They have the racially-learned skills of Flight and Free Fall at DX [3 points], as well as one racially-learned melee weapon skill at DX [2 points]. Their racial disadvantages are Light Sensitivity [-2 to all skills in normal daylight without eye-protection, -10 points] and Subjugation [-20 points].

T'sa

The t'sa are a humanoid reptilian species from the planet Taasa. They average 1.6 meters in height. Their skin is covered with tough scales, giving them natural armor, and they have slim, whip-like tails. T'sa are fast-moving and skittish, evolved from a species preyed upon by larger reptiles on their homeworld. They breed only once per year. The female t'sa lays a clutch of eggs and cares for the hatchlings. T'sa reach physical maturity in only three months, after which their mother has nothing more to do with them. T'sa family bonds are between members of the same egg clutch rather than parent and child.

The t'sa have a fairly peaceful history of technological development. They achieved space flight early, but did not discover stardrive on their own. They received the technology from their first contacts with humans, still a sore point among the t'sa, who think it was just "dumb luck" that humans discovered stardrive first. Even without stardrive technology, the t'sa managed to settle other star systems using vast cryogenic "sleeper ships." The T'sa Cluster was already an interstellar civilization when they first encountered humans. The Cluster currently lies within Concord Prime space, and is the only non-human independent nation in the Stellar Ring.

Racial Template [30 points]: T'sa are ST -2 [-20 points], DX +1 [10 points]. They have the racial advantages of Combat Reflexes [15 points], Early Maturation (3 months) [25 points], Scales (DR 2) [6 points], Sharp Teeth [5 points], and +1 with all Technical Skills [6 points]. Their racial disadvantages are Attentive [-1 point], Curious [-5 points], Proud [-1 point] and Short Lifespan [-10 points].

Weren

Weren are tall, bipedal humanoids covered in thick fur. They have tusks and sharp, retractable claws on their hands. When discovered by the Orlamu Theocracy, their homeworld of Kurg had achieved a late-Renaissance level of development. The Orlamus do their best to maintain Kurg's native culture and development, guiding the weren along the path to enlightenment, and allowing modest emigration from the planet to other worlds.

Weren are fiercely warlike and deeply philosophical. A weren who embraces a particular philosophy becomes nearly fanatical about it, and weren arguments tend to degenerate into brawls. Weren often find employment as soldiers and

mercenaries, particularly in the Orlamu military. They have no difficulties learning to use advanced technology; a gun is a gun, even if they don't understand how it works.

Racial Template [35 points]: Weren are ST +2 [20 points], DX -1 [-10 points], HT +2 [20 points], IQ -2 [-20 points]. They have the racial advantages Chameleon +2 [14 points], Extra Hit Points +2 [10 points], Fur (DR 1 and keeps warm) [4 points] and Sharp Claws [25 points]. They have the racially-learned skill of Brawling at DX [2 points]. They have the racial disadvantage Primitive [TL4, -30 points]. Codes of Honor and Fanaticism are very common.

Using Star*Drive in a GURPS Traveller Campaign

Gamemasters running *GURPS Traveller* campaigns may wish to use *Star*Drive* material in their existing campaign. There are several ways to do this.

The first is introducing *Star*Drive* aliens and background material into the game. The Traveller Imperium holds some 11,000 worlds, and the states surrounding it even more. Any of the *Star*Drive* species could easily become minor races, particularly the sesheyans, the t'sa, and the weren. The mechalus could be a variant human species transplanted by the Ancients, or a true alien species, remarkably similar to Humaniti. Maybe the fraal are the source of "grey aliens" in the *Traveller* universe as well. They would make interesting allies for the psionic Zhodani.

The various stellar nations can be adapted into "pocket empires" inside or outside Imperial space, or branches of Humaniti seeded by the Ancients. Their cultures can be adapted for different planets or societies inside or outside the Imperium. Planetary systems from the *Star*Drive* book or sourcebooks like the *Star Compendium* can be dropped into the *Traveller* universe. *Star*Drive* adventures also adapt fairly well to the *Traveller* setting.

The *Star*Drive* setting could also be a parallel or alternate world for *Traveller* characters to visit. A misjump or an encounter with an Ancient artifact could send the characters into the Verge. They have to deal with the circumstances that sent them there and figure out a way to get back (if they want to go back). Perhaps one of the precursor races from *Star*Drive*, like the Glassmakers or the Stoneburners, interacted with the Ancients, or perhaps they were the Ancients, traveling across dimensions as well as space.

Star*Drive Resources

The *Star*Drive Campaign Setting* book from TSR provides a complete and in-depth description of the setting, including history, the stellar nations, the Galactic Concord, and an extensive look at the Verge and its worlds. The *Alien Compendium* covers a number of alien life forms (intelligent and otherwise) while the *Stellar Compendium* described six additional systems of the Verge in depth. *Threats from Beyond* updates the Verge setting and provides adventure hooks and ideas. The *Dataware* accessory describes computers, robots, and the Grid, while *Starships* does the same for ships of all kinds. Adventures for the *Star*Drive* setting include *The Last Warhulk* and *Planet of Darkness*. Two introductory adventures, *Black Starfall* and *Red Starrise*, are available for free on TSR's website.

Dragon Magazine has regular article for *Alternity* and the *Star*Drive* setting, including a series of in-depth looks at the different alien races, and the companion piece to this article in issue #270 (on sale now), which provides information on using the *Traveller* universe as an *Alternity* setting.

*Star*Drive* support can be found online at [TSR's web site](), including free downloads, sample chapters, and programs, and a *Star*Drive* e-mailing list.

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Fun and Profit Part One: Getting It Written

To paraphrase an old joke from the business world: How do you make a small fortune in gaming? Answer: Start with a large fortune! But seriously folks, many people dream of finding work in the gaming industry, and most who do find their way into the business via one of the two standard paths - getting a job and making your own. Finding your way into gaming through a door someone else has opened is a topic that many others have tackled well. The standard advice -- be professional, write clearly, meet the deadline, etc. -- are all well and good. But, what about the one who would spit on his hands, unsheathe his machete and carve his own way through the jungle? What is involved in creation of a new game company? By request, this month we delve into the murky waters of Fun and Profit Part One: Getting It Written.

The first thing that a new game company needs is a good idea. Now, ideas are easy, especially for someone creative enough to convince himself to start a game company. Unfortunately, *good* ideas are not easy to come by. The game world that has your five friends coming back for more week after week is not necessarily the kind of world that the rest of gaming is just dying to explore. Likewise, simply because you have memorized all the tables in your homebrew wargame does not mean that the rules are "easy to learn." Testing your idea on more than one group is crucial. You must be sure that the product you are developing has as broad an appeal as possible. Test your game with other groups that play similar games. Attempt to test with groups that do not usually play similar games. Local college, high school, and game store based gaming clubs are good places to find people you have not yet met. Your game does not need to appeal to everyone, but a broad base of testers will help you identify player demographics that especially like your game. That will help you later as you try to sell your game. While playtesting, take detailed notes. In the earliest days all the comments will be new. Eventually you will not have to write down every comment people make; you will be familiar with most of them. Nevertheless, if the same comment comes up repeatedly - positive or negative - you should take that comment seriously. Be sure to write down the names of everyone who gives you important feedback. You can print their names in tiny print when the game comes out and gain lots of goodwill from people that helped you early. It is also a nice gesture to send your playtesters a free copy of the release if you can afford it.

Assuming that you believe, even after testing, that the whole history of gaming will one day be described as "just laying the groundwork" for your project, congratulations. You are a game designer. Revel in this moment. This is the last stage before you are going to have to start spending money. From here on out there will be two tracks: the garage method, and the office method. Which track is for you depends entirely on how comfortable you are with spending money and how much you have. There have been spectacular successes and failures with either method.

The cheapest way to move on to the next stage is simply to write a detailed description (or prepare a rudimentary playtest edition) of your idea and sell it to another company. They will handle the remaining steps, and, assuming all goes as well as you hope, write you big checks. In addition, you get designer credit and maybe your design house's logo on the box. This is a much more common strategy than you might think. Look for the "Garfield Games" logo on the side of certain well-known products from Wizards of the Coast. You should approach companies that you respect and have published games similar to the one you are imagining. Any company that has been in business for a long time will have some system in place to evaluate and take over games developed by others. They will most likely ask you to sign some kind of release form. This form will be provided by your targeted company and will be written much to their advantage. Sign the form. They will not even open your game and look at it unless you agree to each of the terms. The offer the company will make for your game, if any, will depend on many things including their own sense of how many copies they can sell and how finished they judge your game to be. Do not be afraid to ask for their rationale for making the offer, and do not be afraid to negotiate. You do not have to sell it. You can always finish the development yourself.

If you make the decision to publish the game yourself, there are two ways to go. You may finish development on your own or hire another professional. Writing it yourself has certain advantages. Not the least of which is the fact that you can keep total control over the way the product comes out. This could take a long time, but some people love the feeling of taking a project from start to finish themselves. In addition, if you keep your day job while developing the game you can use pens and paper from the supply closet and the office copy machine. If you are caught and lose your

job, that is good. Congratulations; you are a full time game designer. When you have completed the game to your satisfaction, you will be ready to go on to the actual production of the game. Advice about that stage will come in a future installment.

If you are not a writer, or if you have the money, you might want to hire a freelance writer to execute your idea. There are many good ones to be found around the industry, most of whom are looking for work. Peruse the credits boxes for products you have enjoyed. This will give you a good place to start. Network. The Academy of Adventure Gaming Art and Design (the group that sponsors the Origins Awards) maintains a membership list that includes freelance designers who are available for jobs. Likewise, several websites have lists of freelance writers available. Check out our friends over at rpg.net, for one. When you contact a freelancer about work, follow the standard business advice - be professional, be enthusiastic, and be honest. It is OK to say you have enjoyed his previous work, but do not risk looking unprofessional. Make sure your pitch is clear and explains why this particular freelancer and this particular project are perfect for each other. Remember though, the best writers are a busy and superstitious lot. You will have a better chance of having one take your bait if you are flexible enough to fit into their schedule, and provide some of the bait as an advance. Expect to pay several thousand dollars for a book-length manuscript. Most writers will not ask for the whole fee up front. You should be able to pay some now, and the rest when the product is finished. Although it might be possible to reduce the cash component through arranging to pay your writers a royalty, experienced writers may not want to take such a deal from a start-up.

No matter how you got it, now you have a completed game manuscript. If you are happy with it, but cannot imagine handling the printing and sales tasks yourself, you can take another run at partnering with another publisher as described above. Nothing will be different, except that you will be entitled to more money, since the product is ostensibly ready for print. (Your partners may not completely agree, but the general rule holds - the more work you did, the more money you deserve.) Next up: Fun and Profit Part Two: The Fine Art of Art.

Perfection

This week I'm going to talk a bit about perfection. No, not the ego-mangling ticking timer game intended to shame uncoordinated children of all ages (second only to *Operation* [the Wacky Doctor's Game!] in its ability to reduce an otherwise well-adjusted six-year-old into a mass of future neuroses). Rather, I'm referring to the challenge to create The Best Possible Whatever.

The strive for perfection? I'm all for it. Perfection? I'm against it.

Last week in the Real World I had an idea. While not itself an unusual occurrence, it did strike me with enough velocity to stop what I was being paid to do and sprint to a computer, where I e-mailed the rest of my gaming group. The idea, while itself not important, related to our *Fading Suns* campaign. In a nutshell, we felt that the base means of goal resolution wasn't working out for us, but we didn't want to face the challenge of translating the entire game world to another system. My idea was how to fix that.

And as I excitedly typed in the rules modification, striving to make the game better for our group, I realized how much I like the imperfections in my favorite systems.

Maybe it's the kid in me, Legos in hand, trying to make my Whatzit of Doom even better than last week's Galactic Exploring Thingamabob. Regardless, I have the strong temptation to tinker and "fix" whatever problems I see in a beloved game system. And, given the number of fan sites out there, with home brew rules, modifications, and the like, I'm pretty sure I'm not alone.

Sure, I've run into purists -- those stoic-minded folks who treat the rules of their favorite game as Holy Writ. "Bah!" they say. "Weapon size time segments were put there for a good reason! I'm certain I don't know what that reason is, but I'm going to use those rules no matter what!" But I think a majority of us tinker with our games, hoping to make them more playable, more realistic, more simple. . . and, in general, more fun.

I mention this because a bunch of high-profile games have either recently had new editions (like *Vampire*) or have new editions coming out soon (like *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*). And each new edition tries to be better than the previous ones. But while perfection may seem to be an attainable goal for some, I believe that, not only is perfection not possible, it isn't desirable.

Think: what's the perfect movie? Well, a romance watcher's perfect movie is different from an action fan's ideal, which is far from a mystery lover's ideal, which is probably not in sync with a foreign film buff. And any film that tries to please everyone. . .say, *Love Fight Whodunnit Deux*. . . is likely to please no one.

So game makers strive to get close, and it falls to us players to get closer to our own personal ideal. We can do this by 1) modifying games that are close to perfect for us, and 2) avoiding games that are far from perfect.

I'll probably talk about this second point next week (unless something more interesting happens). For this week, though, just keep in mind that the games are tools for you; you are not tools for the game. Game makers and players: Keep striving for the "perfect" game, but don't let it keep you from enjoying a Pretty Darn Good game.

Store money in Free Parking. Devise nuclear research rules for *Axis & Allies*. Create variant gadgetry rules for *DC Heroes*. Patch *Myth II* 'til it's unrecognizable. Have fun.

And ask yourself: If they did create a perfect game, what would you do with it? Would you play only that for eternity? Is that part of the definition of the perfect game? Is it possible to get bored with perfection?

Here's one more variant you might like: Tape the *Perfection* timer so you can take as much time as you like. Or, better yet, play *Superfection*. It was more perfect than *Perfection* in my book.

* * *

Editorial bits:

- For folks submitting, *please* hold off on your "Advice for GMs on How to Handle Problem Players" articles. I've got around six I'm sifting through right now. (Or, if you have one you simply *must* write, please make sure it's substantially different from what's out there.)
- The Slushpile has about 30 articles in it. I hope to weed through those sometime tomorrow.
- I now have a new monitor and video card. What does this mean to you? Not much. What does this mean to me? Fewer migraines. Huzzah.
- As ever, feel free to [write](#). . . especially if you're part of the two percent last week who thought that "No, no, a thousand times no!" was the best answer to the question, "Do you think Steven is doing a good job as editor of Pyramid?"

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Harlan Ellison's Watching, p. 214 (originally appearing in *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* / April 1985)
(No, it's not directly game related, but that's why it was worth a jillion stars)

(Four stars) "**Musical Emergency**: Your old radio breaks. Pay $50 to Fagin's for a new used one."

It Came From The Camcorder

"However, our expression will be: That wingless, larval forms of life, in numbers so enormous that migration from some place external to this earth is suggested, have fallen from the sky."
-- Charles Fort, *Book of the Damned*

Not only have they fallen from it, they apparently continue to whiz around in it, in flocks and squadrons. Are they etheric monstrosities? UFOs? Demons? Pieces of the dimension flaking off, or flocks from the next dimension over? Well, that depends on your shutter speed, or rather on that of your camcorder and your campaign. From the dizzying heights of the stratosphere to subterranean caverns, the Rods are in among us -- let's go to the videotape.

"Q: If Rods are everywhere, why can't they be seen? A: Actually Rods can be seen with the naked eye once you know what they look like and have conditioned yourself to see them . . . If you have ever seen something pass by in the corner of your eye . . . and you immediately look and there is nothing there then you probably witnessed a Rod in your eye peripheral . . .. As you see the videos and get conditioned to seeing what they look like then you will see them zip by in front of you."
-- Jose Escamilla, "Frequently Asked Questions About Rods"

Since Fort wrote, of course, pseudoscience has advanced. After years of tireless effort, of staring at frame upon frame of videotape, film editor Jose Escamilla has confidently tagged and classified these "larval forms of life" as "Rods," or (in some usages) "skyfish." In general, they're pale, gray or white rods usually with two or three sets of "appendages" (or crosspieces, or flanges, or fins, or something) sticking out, but they vary along that continuum. They display "flocking" behavior, especially in groups. People who watch Escamilla's lovingly assembled tapes compare the Rods to schools of very fast-moving fish. These creatures, some the size of jumbo jets, tear through the skies so fast that they're invisible -- until you get them on tape. Once exposed to the all-seeing eye of the video camera, however, they can be seen with rigorous (not to say obsessive) frame-by-frame analysis.

Escamilla first noticed them while he was messing around with a video camera in his back yard near (cough) Roswell, New Mexico (or possibly while trying to film UFOs over nearby Midway, New Mexico). By setting the "shutter speed" to 1/10,000 and aiming it into the sun's glow (though not right at the sun -- unsafe) he was able to get plenty of potential Rod images in even 10 minutes of random taping. He alerted the media, and eventually TV crews began noticing Rod sightings all over -- a local news station in New Jersey caught a Rod fleeing a fire, one zoomed through a History Channel documentary, and KWTV-9 in Oklahoma City even filmed one flying into a tornado! When KFMB-TV in San Diego inadvertently taped a Rod, they brought Escamilla in to do a special; when that special got good ratings, they took him to Sotano de las Golondrinas (the Cave of the Swallows) in San Luis Potosi province, Mexico. Here, in this 1100 foot deep shaft, a sports show (about people who dive in the cave) had accidentally caught a lot of Rods on tape; after seeing the "hundreds" of Rods there, Escamilla returned again with a Japanese camera crew. He's still hard at work, frame by frame. (Yes, you in the back with your hand up. What are the Rods, really? Well, if you want to be a big spoilsport about it, they're a combination of optical blurring effects of the videotape, misidentified pieces of grass or fluff caught in the sunlight, and no doubt eager wish-fulfillment.)

"The thirty-thousand-foot level has been reached time after time with no discomfort beyond cold and asthma. What does this prove? A visitor might descend upon this planet a thousand times and never see a tiger. Yet tigers exist, and if he chanced to come down into a jungle he might be devoured. There are jungles of the upper air, and there are worse things than tigers which inhabit them."
-- Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, "The Horror of the Heights"

No, that's just mean-spirited. The Rods are actually some form of aerial jellied cuttlefish, perhaps; the cylindrical lighted aspect might be a spine, or a dorsal fin. The Rods must dwell in attenuated eyries high in the stratosphere, much as some theorists assume life might float in Jupiter's clouds. Escamilla hints that they might have evolved intangibility or antigravity, which is at least as reasonable as anything else -- they may be descended from the protopterygotic insects (the link between crawling and flying bugs), or from the trilobite-eating Anomalocaris of the Cambrian Era, half a billion years ago. (Scientists can't figure out anything else that the Anomalocaris might be related

to, but pseudoscientists, as always, are here to solve mysteries.) Hunting Sky Fish would make a swell aerial safari for particularly mad **GURPS Steampunk** scientists to mount with the cavorite flyer or the tropopausic-potentio-electrical aeronef.

"The entrance to [Sotano de las] Golondrinas is located in one of the most primitive and uncivilized areas of Mexico and local inhabitants are afraid to approach the cave because they believe it is full of 'evil spirits' which lure people to their deaths . . . Because of its huge size, remote location, and unique geological structure, Golondrinas would be an ideal UFO base."
-- Erich A. Aggen, Jr., "Top Secret: Alien UFO Bases," *Search* (Summer 1991)

Modern Rods no longer demand solid food; in fact, they go to some lengths to avoid hitting organic life (like people or the earth). They feed off solar energy, although fringe (even for UFOlogy) UFOlogist Trevor James Constable and the mysterious Countess Zoe Wassilko-Serecki proposed that sky-fish type UFOs began entering our atmosphere in great numbers once humans began pumping the air full of delicious, irresistible microwave emissions. (Possibly Tesla's tests of his power transmitter brought a Queen Rod down to scout as the [1896-97 Airship](#).) This, by the way, would explain why those high-tension power lines and nuclear testing sites always have more than their fair share of UFO sightings; to the atmospheric Rods, it must be like an electromagnetic dessert tray down here now. Constable's notion of UFOs as sky animals closely tracks Escamilla's Rod theories, although Escamilla's FAQ indignantly rejects the notion that the Rods emerged from the crashed saucer of 1947. ("For some reason we always get this question . . .") Although, if the Greys are bio-roids, there's no reason their saucer can't have been powered by bio-tech antigravity energistic atmo-creatures. Maybe the Rods are just a semi-sentient fuel spill.

"[O]n Channel 11 News (Fox), they had a Navy Official on and he stated that 'yes' the Navy has footage of Rods!!!! Do you know what this means? It means that if the Navy knows about Rods and has footage, so must the rest of the Military! AND this means, they know RODS ARE REAL and this means that we've been vindicated by the armed forces of America!"
-- Jose Escamilla, post on Web forum of the Committee Against UFO Silence

Which brings us, ineluctably, to the military coverup of the crash, the negotiations with the aliens (The Rods? The Greys? Both?), or the possibility that the Rods are fallout from a whole different Secret Project. Maybe they're the transmogrified etheric fish caught in the [Philadelphia Experiment](#), or holographic projections designed as the media for psychotropic subliminals in popular videotaped programs (this week on Fox: "When Rods Attack, And Then Tell You To Obey MJ-12"). Perhaps the Rods are Dero hunting pack beasts (which would tie in nicely with the deep Mexican cave). Maybe the [HAARP](#) project is an attempt to feed them, or to domesticate packs of Rods to work with, say, those jetpack jockeys in **GURPS Black Ops** Strike Force Laputa. From their high-atmosphere magnetic-repulsion dirigible, they battle the Greys at the edge of space, keeping the tropopause safe from alien climate control. The inventive (or deranged) GM could populate the upper atmosphere with all manner of jellyfish, sky-krakens, lost ecologies of pteranodons, Martian insects a la *Five Million Years To Earth,* and whatnot, all of it eating jumbo jets and demanding an air-to-air smackdown.

"Q: When is the dimensional collapse starting? A: It's already starting. What you are going to start hearing about in the near future are something called RODS. These will be something that will be video-taped. What you will see will be large streaks shooting through the air that are etheric in nature but will be captured on tape. What you will be seeing is fourth and fifth density craft moving through space, not having the slightest clue that they are flying right through us. That's because at that point you are beginning to see the implosion."
-- From the *Leading Edge* interview with Alex Collier (Nov 16, 1996)

But that's really pretty tame; not true to the roots of the Rods in the peripheral visionaries like Charles Fort. The Rods are actually transplanar beasts, similar to the ones revealed by the Tillinghast device in Lovecraft's tale "From Beyond." These etheric entities are only visible on videotape normally (it's true -- conventional still cameras don't capture them, even at the same shutter speed), thanks to peculiar quirks in the rastering algorithm or the non-Euclidean nature of VHS. But once you've seen enough of them on videotape, they begin showing up everywhere; eventually in your actual peripheral vision. Your eyes have extended into the Rods' plane, a dangerous realm through the looking-glass of conventional reality. Does this hark back to the Mexican legends of "flying serpents" who taught them the dark

arts of human sacrifice? (And, speaking of the Cave of Swallows, the swallow was known as the "witch-chick" in medieval Europe, and associated with Venus, our mirror goddess.) Trevor James Constable soon began to feel uneasy about the "etherian" entities he'd discovered lurking in the outer atmosphere, hinting that they were vampiric parasites, harbingers of evil, stormy petrels "of the Antichrist." Perhaps he was right; already the flotillas of Rods loop hypersonic victory laps in a war we didn't even know we lost, as generations stare into the videotape (could the Rods be causing TV addiction?) and learn to follow the sky beasts, to see them all around us, to submit to rule by the Rods. Freeze frame. And fade out.

by Stephen Kenson

Art by John Zeleznik and Alex Fernandez

This article presents a campaign concept for traveling between an infinity of alternate or parallel universes, similar to the "Infinite Worlds" campaign presented in *GURPS Time Travel*. In fact, the concepts of this article can be combined with the Infinite Worlds campaign quite easily. Although the material is presented in *GURPS* game statistics, it is usable with almost any game-system that allows the possibility of travel to parallel worlds, particularly various super-hero and universal RPG systems.

World Walkers

World walkers (or simply "walkers") are unique individuals who are "unstuck in time" for some unknown reason. This gives them certain unusual abilities, like traveling across parallel worlds, and "reaching" into other worlds and taking things from them. Their nature also appears to free walkers from many of the limitations of time and mortality; walkers are virtually immortal and can live for millennia of personal time.

All walkers have the Advantages World Walker (100 points, see below), Snatcher (80 points, **CI**, p. 45) and Unaging (15 points). Walkers also have great recuperative powers, allowing them to recovery from almost any injury, given enough time and a safe place in which to do it (Regular Regeneration, 25 points). They can be killed just like anyone else, but most walkers are smart enough to know to cut and run when the situation looks bad.

Walkers have the unique ability to identify other Walkers on sight (in person, not over video) with a successful IQ roll. This ability is automatic and apparently foolproof--no disguise or means of concealment affects it--or at least no one has found a means to fool it yet. It is as much a disadvantage as an advantage for most walkers, but they tend to respect each other's privacy and try and avoid attracting attention from "fixed" people.

The "racial package" for being a walker costs 220 points. Walkers should be build on 500 points -- enough to provide them with a wide range of skills and abilities from their travels. Game Masters may want neophyte walker characters to be built on 320 point (base 100 points, plus the world-walker package) with the option for rapid advancement and

learning of new skills from other worlds the characters visit.

Their powers of snatching and traveling, coupled with a potentially infinite lifespan, makes most walkers perpetual wanderers, traveling the multiverse without concern for material need and seeking some personal goal, be it enlightenment, a worthy adversary, or simply the biggest and best party in all reality.

World-Walking (100 points)

This advantage is similar to the World-Jumper advantage (**CI**, p. 48), except where jumpers "jump" to their destination in an instant, walkers have to take the time and "walk" there, across a plethora of parallel worlds.

In order to world-walk, a walker must physically move (at a slow walking pace or faster). He must concentrate for at least 10 seconds and visualize the world he wishes to visit, then make a roll against IQ, at -3 if he is visiting a world he has never been to before, at -5 if the world has major differences he has difficulty visualizing, in the GM's opinion (magic, super-science, etc.). If the walker has an object or person from the destination in his possession, he is at only -2 to IQ, even if he has never been there. If the roll is successful, the world around the walker begins to change to match the destination. A failed roll means the walker wanders for the base time without finding the world he's looking for, while a critical failure sends him to the wrong world! Walkers call this "tripping up."

The time it takes to walk to another world depends on the separation between them. There is a base time of five minutes. For every quantum level separating the two worlds, add another ten minutes. If not using the quantum level structure from *GURPS Time Travel*, the GM decides how "distant" the two worlds are, but no trip takes much more than an hour. The distance between worlds can shift periodically, and there are hazards walkers may encounter "en route" (see below). The time can be reduced by taking a penalty to the IQ roll, -2 to halve the time required (round up each time). A trip cannot take less than the base ten seconds of concentration needed. Walkers call such short trips "side stepping" between worlds.

While world-walking, a walker can carry whatever he can normally carry, up to Heavy Encumbrance. Walkers can also "lead" other people with them, if desired. Another person must be in physical contact with the walker during the whole trip. If they become separated, the other person is lost on a parallel randomly chosen by the GM. Other walkers can follow a walker without the need for physical contact. In fact, other walkers can make an IQ roll to follow a walker's "tracks" across worlds, at -1 for every minute since he passed through.

Walkers move at their normal rate during a world-walk. If the walker is driving or piloting a vehicle or riding a mount, he can take the vehicle and all of its passengers along by taking a penalty to the IQ roll: -1 for a mount, -2 for a vehicle like a motorcycle, -3 for a car, -4 or more for larger vehicles. Bringing vehicles to other worlds can often be problematic; driving a car into a world with no roads can be troublesome, while flying a plane into a world where planes don't work can be disastrous!

The entire trip costs fatigue equal to the total penalty to the IQ roll, at the end of the trip. Slow trips on foot to known worlds require no significant fatigue, they're just as easy as walking. Faster trips or trips to unknown worlds can be very tiring.

Advantages

Aside from the Advantages they all share, walkers may have any Advantage allowed by the GM. Some Advantages (particularly magical, psionic, and technological ones) may not function in some worlds. If an Advantage is particularly limited by this (in the GM's view) an Accessibility Limitation can be applied to the cost.

Language Talent is extremely useful for walkers, who often encounter new languages and need to pick up strange languages quickly.

Walkers seem more likely to possess Advantages like Magery and Psionics than other people. Some come from worlds where such abilities are known, while others remain unaware of their potential until they visit a world where they can learn to utilize their talents.

Disadvantages

Walkers can have any Disadvantages the GM allows for the campaign. Status as a walker provides no apparent benefits apart from those described above, and walkers come from diverse worlds, background and cultures. Again, certain magical or technological disadvantages may not function on certain worlds. If this is likely to make the Disadvantage too easy to avoid, the GM should disallow it. Walkers also tend to be fairly free of social- and status-related Disadvantages, since they rarely carry over from one world to the next. Enemies with the ability to follow a walker from world to world are the only really significant ones a walker can have.

Note that walkers with Sleepwalking (**CI**, p. 84) *can* and sometimes do world-walk in their sleep!

Skills

Walkers can have any of the skills natives of their dimension have and many of them pick up skills from worlds they visit. Languages are common; experienced walkers learn a *lot* of languages in their travels. Social Skills are also quite useful in allowing a walker to make friends and contacts on worlds he visits. For the times when Social Skills don't work, Combat Skills tend to be vital. Although many walkers come from worlds with advanced weapons, and carry them, most learn some martial arts and how to use various melee weapons sooner or later. Guns can jam, misfire, run out of ammo and just plain fail to work in some worlds, and magical weapons are notoriously unreliable, but a fist, club, or sharpened piece of steel work in just about every world.

Race

Walkers are not all human; some of them come from *very* alternate worlds where the dominant life-form is something else entirely. Information about alien walkers is sparse, but rumors abound that they exist and may be closely watching Earth for signs of something. Perhaps the ability to traverse dimensions is an evolutionary leap required to join galactic civilization, or perhaps walking is unique to Earthlings and poses a threat to some alien empire somewhere (or somewhen) else.

Multiversal Features

Drifts

Drifts are places "unstuck" in time in ways similar to walkers. They are to normal geography what walkers are to normal people. These places "drift" through the multiverse, popping up from time to time on different worlds, then fading away to go somewhere else. They are the source of legends and stories about mysterious lost cities and civilizations like Brigadoon, Shangri-la, El Dorado, the Bermuda Triangle, and possibly even Atlantis.

Some drifts appear to follow a fixed "course" through a series of parallel worlds, swinging back through them on a regular cycle, like a comet that appears every century or so. Other drifts float around at random, with no apparent rhyme or reason for their movement.

Walkers can visit drifts and even "follow" them through the multiverse as they move about. Drifts can also serve as "vehicles" for non-walkers to travel the multiverse, provided they don't mind having no control over their "ride," or the possibility they will never see their home world ever again. A "rider" who leaves the drift before it phases out could end up permanently stranded on another world.

Nexus Points

The opposite of drifts, nexus points are "strange attractors" in the multiverse, fixed places where walkers are drawn. They often serve as way stations or gateways between many different worlds. Like drifts, there seems to be no definitive reason why nexus points appear. Some are clearly artificial, created by science or magic, often by civilizations long since vanished. Others appear entirely natural, with no apparent cause for their existence.

Nexus points seem to "bridge" different parallels, making it possible to move from one to another more easily. A nexus might be a network of caves, all hall of mirrors or a house of many doors and passages, each leading to a different world. The Horatio Club from *GURPS Time Travel* is an example of a nexus. The nexus itself exists on all the worlds it reaches, creating a kind of "anchor point" between them. Walkers use nexus points as "landmarks" in the multiversal landscape, familiar places to gather and return to. For this reason, nexus points are usually considered "neutral ground" for all walkers; conflicts are not permitted there.

Reality Storms

The greatest natural hazard of world-walking is the threat of reality storms; violence disturbances in the fabric of the multiverse. A reality storm appears much like an atmospheric storm; violent winds, dark clouds and precipitation, although the rainfall is not always water, it may be blood, wine, honey, copper coins, little frogs or any number of things.

Storms have an effect of "blinding" world-walkers, making it more difficult to reach a destination. The storm imposes an additional penalty on the IQ roll to make the trip successfully, anywhere from -2 to as much as -10 for the most powerful of storms. This penalty also increases the fatigue cost of the trip; walkers who encounter a reality storm often end up exhausted in some strange world far from their intended destination. Some walkers have vanished into a reality storm, never to be seen again.

On occasion, a reality storm manifests *on* a world rather than between worlds. The storm can "pick up" and transport objects and individuals from one world to another (much like the tornado from *The Wizard of Oz*; in fact, some walkers call them "Oz storms"). Walkers can resist this effect with a successful Will roll, modified by the storm's strength, as above. Other people are simply carried off. The Banestorm (from *GURPS Fantasy*) is a wandering reality storm created by a failed ritual spell on the world of Yrth, responsible for transporting many different races (including humans) to that world.

Conflict Between Walkers

Walkers tend to have their own agendas, whatever they might be. From time to time, they come into conflict. There are few actual "laws" of walker society, only some traditions and rules of conduct (like respecting nexus points as neutral ground). Otherwise, walkers tend to do as they please. It is not uncommon for more experienced walkers to educate novice walkers only just discovering their abilities in order to cultivate allies (or for more experienced walkers to kill novices before they can learn too much...). Some conflicts between walkers have become legends and myths on different worlds they visit.

Walkers sometimes draw the attention of cultures aware of the existence of parallel worlds and cross-time travel. They are treated as sorcerers, demons, saints, or superbeings on worlds that lack cross-time travel, either revered or hunted down and killed or enslaved. Worlds with their own means of cross-time travel, like the Infinity Patrol from *GURPS Time Travel*, are interested in recruiting walkers for their cause, or at least ensuring they don't interfere with it. Walkers often end up as mercenaries in interdimensional wars. Gamemasters running another type of Infinite Worlds campaign (such as J. Hunter Johnson's "Banestorming Infinity Unlimited" setting) can use world walkers as another faction of cross-time travelers.

The World Walking Campaign

The easiest way to begin a world-walking campaign is to have a group of neophyte walkers meet up at a nexus point (a tavern, perhaps?) before departing together for other worlds. Perhaps they are all hunted by the same enemy (a powerful walker, interdimensional being or agency). The walkers have to learn to use their abilities and survive long enough to turn the tables on their enemy.

Another variation is the "quest," where walkers make their way across many different parallels seeking the parts of a particular device or legendary item, the clues to answer a riddle or other important question or simply gathering

information and exploring different parallels for an organization like the Infinity Patrol.

A world-walking campaign allows the GM to introduce literally infinite campaign settings, but also requires the ability to come up with new locations and NPCs on the fly, since the world walkers can go literally *anywhere* and find nearly *anything*.

by Bob Portnell

Art by [Keith Johnson](#)

I like *GURPS*. It was the only role-playing game I used for a decade, starting with one of the last copies of *Basic Set, Second Edition*. But if *GURPS* has a major flaw, it is that the system is not for beginners. This is intentional; the game is designed by gamers and for gamers and assumes a certain level of experience. ("I am, quite frankly, trying to attract the adult gamer with *GURPS*. I don't intend to write down to my audience." -- Steve Jackson, quoted in *Heroic Worlds* by Lawrence Schick.)

There's nothing wrong with this philosophy, until you try to introduce novice players to the game. There is logic in letting your players begin with a good system. But blank stares and scratched heads fill the room, it takes a full evening just to build a party of characters . . . and no playing gets done! Even players experienced with other, less choice-oriented, games have trouble building that first *GURPS* character.

GURPS is not the only game subject to this problem, of course. Many of our older favorite games suffer from a degree of complexity; and many new games often have their functional concepts obscured by awkward writing and poor focus. With some advance work, the game master can compensate for these and dramatically ease the pain of the beginning role-players.

"What are we supposed to be doing, anyway?"

Your group may be so new that it's never heard of a role-playing game before, let alone played. It's a fact of life that every hobby has its own unique perspectives and jargon; you'll want to find a way to ease your raw novices into the ideas of role-play.

Most every game published these days has an obligatory "what is this?" section, which describes role-playing games in various terms: as shared storytelling, as improvisational theater, or what-have-you. Find one of these which agrees with your personal opinions and present it to the players. I was writing one myself, until I bought a game and discovered that Guy McLimore had written it already, right down to the analogies I was planning on using. "What is a Role Playing Game?" is available on the web at [MicroTactix's website](#); share it with your players. Then be ready to answer questions, because no matter how one describes it, role-playing always sounds harder than it is. Toss in some favorite personal anecdotes highlighting the kind of play you enjoy. Refrain from bashing any other games or design philosophies at this stage. You'll only confuse your new players.

Drain The Game's Essence

At this point, your new players have some clue about role-playing and about characters. Time to start introducing the mechanics.

In most games, this boils down to a few simple dice-rolling conventions. (Good ol' **Dungeons & Dragons** is the exception to this, of course, until its Third Edition materializes this year.) Explain the basic rules and how and when each is used. Demonstrate each fundamental rule at least once; repetitions may be needed if the rule is sufficiently complicated.

For **GURPS**, the conventions are already provided on page 9 of **GURPS Basic**; many other games have adopted this "quick start" model of rules. If you have this sort of information, read it to your players word for word. Slowly. Careful attention to the core rules will be rewarded by comfortable play later.

Follow up by using strict game terminology for a while. Don't say, "Make a Naturalist roll." Instead say, "Make a Skill Roll vs. Naturalist skill." Soon the players will have a handle on the new jargon and the group can use any preferred shortcuts or slang it likes.

A Need-To-Know Basis

In choice-based game systems like **GURPS**, Hero System and many others, the array of possibilities in character building is staggering. It's also far too much to heap upon a beginning player.

So, start pruning! There are many ways to minimize the information overload. Edit skill lists, removing the inappropriate. Your player hardly needs to see the game has a "Nuclear Physics" skill if the setting is Arthurian England! In a fantasy campaign, many technology or firearms skills could be omitted; in a far future setting, the melee weapons (swords) may be obsolete. (Sorry, **Traveller** fans!)

If your game has "sub-skills," specializations or what not, dump them! A Gun is a Gun is a Gun, and the same Mechanic skill used to tune up a muscle car can be used to repair Grandfather's antique pocket watch. No, this isn't realistic and your players will notice eventually. When the players do recognize this "flaw" in the game, they'll probably be ready to move up to the detail and realism sub-skills provide.

The same treatment can be applied to advantages, disadvantages, prerequisites, spell lists, etc. This will not only help the players, but can also give the game master a firm sense of what is and isn't so in his gaming world.

Character Cookie Cutters

Templates have been around for some time (Dungeons & Dragons classes and Vampire clans are templates in a way), and with good reason. They are a terrific tool for quickly bringing the player into the game. A template assures the character will be able to meet his given function within the framework of the adventure, yet still gives the player some control over the final shape of the character.

If your game has templates, well and good. If not, you may need to design them. (Here's a project to get on a publisher's good side: design a template system for them.) In simplest terms, a template is an almost-finished character

sheet. It contains only the minimum game information needed for a character to be competent at what he does (whatever that is). This leaves a number of features which the player may then tweak, improving this, possibly dispensing with that, and adding new traits over here.

Many games have a section describing the types of characters one can expect in the system. This can be your starting point. If your game has a "jobs table," listing required traits for given professions, you have an extra tool as you assemble the templates. Don't forget to stay within the limits of your "lightened" rules set!

Once you've designed your templates, keep copies! They're always useful for new player characters and quick non-player characters.

Having templates ready for your players not only saves them the burden of building completely from scratch; it also shows them how a properly completed character sheet looks! It also gives the game master opportunity to subtly tailor the characters to the needs of the campaign. ("What do you mean, nobody bought First Aid Skill? Grrrr.")

Keeping It Simple

Now you're ready to play. In most situations, the directions you provided for the basic game mechanics will do. But it will happen that your characters will get into a fight. Combat is one of the most complicated activities any game simulates, and it is where new players will bog down in confusion the most quickly.

If your game has a "basic" combat system, use it. Don't add any optional or advanced rules. If your game doesn't have a basic system, perhaps you'll need to create one. Don't worry, you won't be using it long. Resist the impulses to add or restore advanced rules until your players show you they are ready. They'll probably be asking for advanced elements before the end of the first combat encounter!

The *GURPS* Angle

Starting in Summer 1998, Steve Jackson Games began providing tools which incorporate most of these suggestions. *GURPS Lite* is the essence of the game boiled down into 32 pages and made available free on the Internet. Templates were introduced officially in *GURPS Wizards*; detailed guidelines for constructing templates are found in that book and the later template collections: *GURPS Warriors*, and the forthcoming *GURPS Rogues* and *GURPS Villains*. (These books and a system conversion rule or two could give you all the templates you'd need for any game you'd play!)

Summing Up

New players of any game can find themselves overwhelmed by the volume of unfamiliar concepts. Some advance work and patient training by the GM can reduce this information to manageable levels and help the beginning gamer find more to enjoy in his first game sessions.

Pyramid Pick

Postmodern Magick (for Unknown Armies)

Published by Atlas Games

Written by Tim Akers, Ted Cabeen, Michael Daisey, Tim Dedopulos, Kenneth Hite, Joshua Kronengold, Daniel Ksenych, Nicole Lindroos, Michael D. Mearls, Rick Neal, Lisa Padol, James Palmer, John Snead, Greg Stolze, Tim Toner, John Tynes, Chad Underkoffler, and Ian Young

192 pages, $23.95 (perfect bound, softcover)

This long anticipated supplement for *Unknown Armies* was well worth the wait. Don't let that extra "k" in the word "Magic" turn you off. It's chock full of new schools of magic, artifacts, rituals, cabals and more, all ready to be dropped into your *Unknown Armies* campaign.

Postmodern Magick opens with a fun short story by John Tynes; it uses several characters introduced in *Lawyers, Guns, and Money*, but you should be able to follow it if you haven't seen that supplement. Next is a chapter on the theory and history of magick, expanding on the information found in the main rulebook, which makes interesting, but hardly essential reading. It includes a lengthy and well-thought-out section on how each of the various schools of magick deals with insanity (an important component of *Unknown Armies*), as well as a treatment of unique schools of magick (this two page section alone could inspire countless NPCs and adventures). We are then provided with a short rules section on creating new formula spells for existing schools of magick and ten new rituals (The Pentecost Ritual and the Ritual of Union are outstanding).

We are then treated to twelve (!) new schools of magick. Several are worthy of special note. Amoromancy (whose practitioners gain power by making others fall in love with them, while they themselves are unable to love), Bibliomancy (based in part on Chad Underkoffler's *Pyramid* article), and Iconomancy (magic based on imitating revered historical figures) are three of the best. One problem I had with several of the new schools of magick is that they are really suitable only for villains or NPCs. For example, it would be extremely difficult to role-play a Thanatomancer (an adept who gains power by ritualistically killing living beings) in most campaigns. Other schools tend toward eccentricity; Personamancy (mask-based magick), for example, while interesting, is not likely to be used by many characters, I would suspect.

Postmodern Magick then includes a short section on five new types of unnatural beings and provides further rules for Automata, quasi-organic creations of Mechanomancers, including rules for using them as player characters. Ten new artifacts are likewise included. The Alter Tongue, Demon Stration Tape, the Knocking Box, and the Cardboard Palace are some of the best and should easily provide adventure seeds.

The book concludes with a lengthy section of NPC organizations and individuals, including five new cabals and five independent NPCs (including two with new and *very* interesting magickal abilities - Enlightened Tai Chi and Urban Shamanism both have excellent potential). The Bad Man, a sinister Avatar of the Merchant should probably be toned down for most campaigns; as written, he's nigh omnipotent. Several of the NPCs are lackluster, though, and I found the Justice League analogue/homage ("Team Salvation") trite and perhaps inconsistent with the tone of *Unknown Armies*; though, to be fair, this group does provide an illustration of what could be done in a "pulpier" or more cinematic *UA* campaign. Most of the other NPCs (e.g., the Grail Knights, Carthage and Rome) are interesting, and

would make excellent contributions to any campaign.

The book is well written and logically organized. There are a few more typos than I have come to expect from Atlas Games's products, but they don't overly detract from the overall quality of the product. The cover looks great and the interior artwork is moody and quirky as always, though some pieces are of decidedly better quality than others.

If you were looking for additional information on the Invisible Clergy or additional Archetypes, you won't find them here. They will be the focus of the next *Unknown Armies* release *Statosphere*, coming out in a few months. It's not a big deal -- there is plenty of information on other topics here -- you should just be aware that won't find any new Archetypes here.

Many of *Postmodern Magicks*'s new schools of magick, NPCs, artifacts, and rituals could easily provide adventure seeds or even ideas for entire campaigns. If you are interested in modern "urban fantasy," are already involved in an existing *UA* campaign, or are even considering playing *Unknown Armies*, you owe it to yourself to check this book out.

-- Andrew Byers

Pokémon Jr. Adventure Game

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Game Design by Bill Slavicsek and Stan!

Game Development: Jeff 'Zippy' Quick

Boxed set, $9.99

Pokémon Jr. is the latest game from Wizards of the Coast and is billed as an adventure game recommended for a parent and 1-6 players, ages 6-8. The box contains a 60-page story book, 26 Pokémon power cards, 6 Pokémon trainer checklists, 2 Pokécoins, 48 hit tokens and a die (d6). The game is not compatible with the *Pokémon* CCG or any of the computer games the CCG was based on. It is a stand-alone game of storytelling for young children and parents.

Players become young Pokémon trainers seeking glory, experience and more Pokémon while the parent uses the story book to guide them. There are 48 Pokémon cards for the trainers to collect through various encounters detailed within the story book. Combat consists of die rolls compared to one of two maneuvers on each Pokémon power card. If the die roll succeeds a number of hit tokens are placed on the opponent's card. Once the hit tokens exceed the HP (hit point) total of the Pokémon that Pokémon faints. Occasionally this technique is used to succeed at various other tasks such as scaring off a flock or wild birds or pushing over a tree, but the technique is similar. Each Pokémon has two attacks, one of which has special effects such as healing HPs or attack again. This special ability succeeds or fails with a flip of the Pokécoin, essentially heads or tails with a smiling or fainting Pikachu in place of your regular currency. The parent uses the Story book to interact with the trainers and guide the adventure.

When I first heard that Wizards of the Coast was producing a Pokémon adventure game, I was skeptical as to its worth. I was pleasantly surprised by what I found within the *Pokémon Jr.* box, conveniently designed to hang on your supermarket's checkout rack. This presumably first in a series of boxed adventures is called *Pokémon Emergency* and allows the players to begin their careers as trainers much the same way Ash and his friends in the TV show do. They are given a single Pokémon and then sent out into the world to defeat, capture and train more Pokémon. The parent, assuming the role of Narrator, leads the tykes through 16 episodes challenging them to compete against wild animals, natural disasters, rival trainers and of course the infamous Team Rocket. As Narrator the parent presents the situation and asks a number of leading questions. The players respond to these questions be describing what their trainers do, and where they go. Naturally each episode ends with a climactic event. . . generally a fight, but not always.

Anyone familiar with role-playing games will recognize these conventions. The gamemaster/PC interaction and episodic nature of RPGs translate very well to *Pokémon Jr.* But don't think for a moment that because the game targeted at young children that it is in anyway deficient or poorly crafted. An adolescent or an adult will probably not fine the game interesting or in anyway captivating, but to a child and their parent, that's another story. The story Book sets up a unique dynamic between the parent and children, where both participate in running the game. *Pokémon Jr.*, like RPGs in general promotes problem solving and encourages cooperation, both of which are important skills for any developing child. To help the story progress, the parent asks questions during an episode such as in Episode 5: The Broken Bridge.

"There's a river ahead of you. A little boy sits at the edge of the river. He looks sad."

- "What does the little boy look like?"
- "What do you say to the little boy?"

By encouraging the children to describe the action, they can better visualize the story. Not only that but they can have a lot of fun simply telling each other what they think the story looks like visually. Young children are very visual and like to describe things, especially to adults. The parent, on the other hand, will enjoy seeing their children working their way through the problems each episode provides them. Watching your child learning new skills and analytical thinking can be very rewarding, not to mention simply spending quality time with your child. And in my opinion playing *Pokémon Jr.* is definitely quality time.

While *Pokémon Jr.* is obviously a kid's game, written and aimed at the children's market, it is also an excellent primer for RPGs. The game is more similar to *Once Upon a Time*, by Atlas Games and its cooperative approach to storytelling, than a conventional RPG. That's what makes it work. I can't imagine sitting a bunch of 6-year-olds down to the violence of a *Shadowrun* or *Rifts* adventure, but *Pokémon Jr.* I can see myself playing with my own children (once I have them). It's not the mythical link between CCGs and RPGs, but it might just be the first exposure to role-playing for a brand-new generation of gamers, and frankly that's not such a bad idea.

-- Andrew J. Lucas

Pyramid Review

Thief II: The Metal Age

Published by [Eidos Interactive](#)

Developed by [Looking Glass Studios](#)

System requirements: Windows 9X, Pentium II 266 processor, a 3D accelerator, 48 MB of RAM and 250 MB of hard drive space

$39.95

Have you ever imagined skulking through the shadows, waylaying an unsuspecting traveler and darting away with his heavy purse? Rather than risk a lengthy jail term, you should probably limit these dark impulses to role-playing games. However, that solution is problematic too. There has always been a certain amount of tension involved in role-playing a thief. Unless you are lucky enough to role-play with a group of thieves, you and your character are treated like second-class citizen by the more honest members of your group. Every time a gold piece comes up missing, you are accused of stealing it. Every time a deadly trap is suspected, you are sent in like a canary into a coal mine. Let's face it; the thief isn't really suited for group play. You could always slip away from the party for some nocturnal revenue generation, but this means the rest of the group is forced to sit around twiddling their thumbs while you have fun.

Pyramid Review: Thief II: The Metal Age

In December of 1998, Eidos Interactive gave all the potential thieves of the world an outlet for their larcenous impulses when they quietly released the critically acclaimed *Thief: The Dark Project*. They described the game as the world's only "first-person sneaker." The graphics were dated by the standards of the time, but the game play was compelling and the level design was excellent. It offered a blend of stealth and avoidance against human opponents with exploration and combat against various subterranean monsters and the undead. Behind the various levels was an entertaining and well-conceived storyline to drive the action.

In normal Eidos fashion, a Gold version of the game was released while tweaks to the game engine were made in preparation for *Thief II: The Metal Age*. *Thief II* takes the most popular elements of the original game and an improved graphics engine to produce another great game. Thief II now sports 16 bit textures, colored lighting, weather effects and double the polygon count for character models. The graphics are still not comparable with *Unreal Tournament* or *Quake Arena*, but that should not dissuade you from playing this excellent game.

The strength of *Thief II* is in the atmosphere. As the cynical master thief Garrett, you will have the opportunity to explore a huge city with an interesting mixture of technology and magic. The city is home to the Hammerites and their fanatical offshoot, the Mechanists. These religious groups seek to impose law and order on their surroundings, and are responsible for most of the technological innovations in the city. The Pagans, a nature worshipping Luddite cult, oppose them. Above it all (or beneath it all), are the enigmatic Keepers. This secretive group is responsible for Garrett's years of training and attempts to keep a delicate balance between these two extremes.

Set in this interesting environment are huge, well designed levels.

Gone are the **Tomb Raider**-style exploration levels. **Thief II** takes place almost exclusively in urban settings. You can run across the rooftops on the way to rob a bank or a noble's home. Once you approach your target, you can case the joint to choose the best way to enter. There is no single way to accomplish your goal. The level designers have given you dozens of options and alternate paths to follow. You will never feel like you are being railroaded. In fact the huge levels will force you to consult your map regularly to avoid getting lost.

While investigating your target, you will be able to utilize a wide variety of thieving tools. The lock picks, flash bombs and sap from **Thief** remain. Garrett's selection of arrows has been expanded to include the vine arrow, an expanded version of the old rope arrow. Light sticks are now available to light your way through the darkest areas. The most interesting, but least practical, tools are centered on Garrett's mechanical eye gained at the end of **Thief**. His artificial eye is capable of zooming in on long-range targets, and a companion orb can be sent ahead to scout areas without risking detection.

On your way to your target, you will be able to explore any number of side adventures. In the demo you can witness a fight between two rival groups of guards, overhear a nobleman whine about not being invited to the night's gala and interrupt a pair of inept thieves on a second story job. At each turn, you are alerted to these side adventures by eavesdropping on the conversations of the city's inhabitants. Everything that is lacking in the game's graphics is made up for with its excellent use of audio. You will be rewarded for listening intently at each door before opening it.

Once inside, you will be faced with some of the most sophisticated AI opponents ever encountered in a first-person action game. If you are not careful and leave behind clues of your presence like open doors or dead bodies, the guards will sound the alarm and begin searching for you. You can extinguish torches to darken the corridors, but now the guards will relight them. The improved AI in **Thief II** also allows the guards to change elevation to find you (no more hiding on the tops of tables!). If you are still out of reach, the guards may flee to bring back archers.

When the inevitable occurs and you have to engage one of the guards in combat, you will be able to take advantage of the new body part specific damaging. However, even with the benefits of a head-shot, you will not be able to hold your own in a one-on-one fight. Only by attacking with surprise and from behind can you hope to defeat the better armed and armored guards. If you are forced to attack without these advantages, you can expect to waste dozens of arrows trying to defeat them or to be chopped to pieces in hand-to-hand combat.

If **Thief II** has a weakness, it is that it is too similar to its predecessor. There are several levels that are predictable and simply expanded versions from the previous game. The graphics engine was dated when it first debuted, and the enhancements have barely extended its lifespan. We will have to wait until **Thief III** to see a radically different look for this line. The aspects of the original Thief that made it such an innovative, fun game to play are still present and should satiate the gaming world's thieves until the next one is released.

If you fancy yourself a would-be footpad, pick up a copy of **Thief II**, turn down the lights, and crank up the volume for some serious fun. Don't be surprised if you find yourself nervously holding your breath as Garrett hides in the shadows from an approaching guard. Don't be surprised if you shout out after being startled by an unexpected trap. Don't be surprised if you find yourself playing this game into the wee hours of the morning. It is so engrossing (and fun) that you may even find yourself tiptoeing around the house, sneaking up on your friends and taking their money.

You can download a demo of *Thief II* from [Gamespot](#).

-- John C. Post

Introduction

Arguably, the two great cities of the Italian Renaissance were Florence and Venice. Both were wealthy, politically important, and centers of art and learning. However, while Florence looked to western Europe for its allies and made its money as a center of banking, *La Serenissima*, the Most Serene Commune of Venezia, looked to the east and was the crossroads of world trade, playing a tremendous role in transmitting the Italian Renaissance to the rest of Europe. It was a city of luxury, Abandon, and a powerful, remarkably stable government. And, of course, it can be a great setting for historical and fantasy role-playing.

Geography and Land Use

Venice sits at the northwestern corner of the Adriatic sea where the northern Italian coast begins to curve eastward towards the Balkan peninsula. The city sits in a long, narrow lagoon with the mainland and the Brenta river delta to the north and west and sandbars and a few small islands to the south and east. The eastern side of the lagoon is defined by a long, fairly straight series of sandbars called the Lido. While the city itself appears to be a single island cut by canals, it is actually a collection of closely set islands, joined by bridges, construction, and silt deposits from the Brenta. The lagoon is mostly deep enough for all but the largest ships of the age to sail on, but near the shore on the landward side of the lagoon, mud flats and salt pans are exposed by low tides.

At its height, Venice had a population of nearly 200,000 (coincidentally, the modern city held about that many people as recently as the 1960's). However, its population was closer to 100,000 to 120,000 during most of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance, dipping to less than half that after bouts of plague.

If other Renaissance cities were crowded, Venice was packed to the gills. It was, at times, the most populous city in Italy, and was physically not significantly larger than any other. The city grew slightly as more land was filled in, but not nearly as fast as its population. Except for piazzas, small private courtyards, and the Arsenal, the city is almost entirely built up.

History

Venice only gradually became a city. The islands in and around the lagoon at the mouth of the Brenta river were lightly populated at least as far back as the Roman empire. Legend has it that the population grew as refugees fleeing Attila the Hun settled there. The region saw another influx of refugees when the Frankish king Pipin invaded northern Italy in the ninth century. It was around this time the people of the region decided they needed a common government, and so the first Doge was installed at Rivoalto (soon called Rialto), the island that became the core of Venice.

In the years that followed, Venice became the dominant naval power of the Adriatic and spread its influence into the eastern Mediterranean. While colonies were established through the Mediterranean, Venice didn't follow a policy of inland territorial expansion until it was already an established power. Instead of fighting wars for territory, Venice fought for trade concessions: rights of passage through other nations' waters, exclusive rights to trade in certain goods, and exemptions from local taxes.

From its earliest years, Venice enjoyed a close relationship with the Byzantine empire. That partnership helped keep Venice free of the foreign domination of the rest of Italy that was prevalent during the Middle Ages. Initially, Venice

was a sort of Byzantine protectorate and agent in the west, in exchange for which the Venitians got special privileges trading in Byzantine ports. As Venice became more powerful and the Byzantine empire less so, the relationship changed considerably. It even turned predatory briefly during the Fourth Crusade in 1204 when Venice drew French Crusaders into a Byzantine dynastic struggle which resulted in Westerners deposing the native emperors for over fifty years.

Venice emerged into the Renaissance after a costly and inconclusive series of wars with Genoa, its chief trading rival. Although its population and coffers were depleted in the wake of war and plague, the city was able to take advantage of its own relative stability in the midst of the chaotic fifteenth century and rebuild its colonies and trade routes as far away as the coasts of the Black Sea. The Venetian policy abroad was to govern only coastal areas rather than inland territory, which could not be supported by her naval power. In fairly short order, Venice came to control most of the eastern Adriatic coast as far south as Greece, as well as Mediterranean territories including Crete and Cyprus.

There was also a concerted move to increase its territorial holdings in northern Italy. Venice realized that trade concessions and control of ports were all well and good, but she needed a larger tax base, an agricultural base under its own control, and more manpower. Venice already controlled the region around its lagoon, but eventually established control over most territory north of the Po river nearly as far west as Milan. This conquest was accomplished by mercenary troops supported by Venetian fleets sailing up the Po and, at times, hauled overland.

Venice's expansion was accomplished by a combination of warfare and diplomacy. In Europe, Venice participated in the shifting alliances and enmities that kept an uneasy balance between the five major powers of Italy (Venice, Milan, Florence, the Papal States, and Naples), a balance influenced by the politics of the rest of the Continent, in which the Italian cities were sometimes used as pawns, and the growing struggle between the Catholic church and the Protestant Reformation. As the most powerful city in Italy, Venice often found itself on the wrong end of most alliances, but it was the only city in Italy never to be taken by a foreign power. In the east, Venice was the western power to bear the brunt of Turkish expansion. Venitians could suddenly find themselves at war with the Turks as they attempted to secure another coastal city, then at peace just as quickly as diplomats negotiated a treaty. Venice was engaged in elaborate diplomacy here as well, negotiating with both the Turks and potential allies farther east, such as the Persians.

Through the sixteenth century, Venice nosed into a slow decline. Growing trade through the Atlantic and increasing problems with the Ottoman empire made Venice's own trade routes less profitable, and the city itself was hard-pressed to compete against increasingly powerful nation-states, particularly Spain. Still, Venice retained its independence and cherished institutions until the end of the eighteenth century. For a thousand years, Venice had been free and self-governing, an achievement no other city in Italy could match.

Government and Politics

By the Renaissance, Venice's government consists of four tiers. The lowest is the Grand Council, a body of several hundred hereditary aristocrats encompassing the majority of Venice's wealthiest merchants. However, not all rich men are on the Council, nor are all Councilors rich, and except for the right to participate in government, the legal distinction between nobles and commoners is slight. The Council rarely convenes as a whole, but it provides members for the second tier, the Senate, a group of sixty men elected for one-year terms. The Senate primarily regulates trade and foreign affairs (in Venice, the two are synonymous). The Grand Council also provides members of the third tier, the Ducal Council, an even more powerful body of six men, who advise the Doge and call on the lesser bodies to form committees and take actions. Finally, the government is headed by the Doge. Formerly a hereditary dukedom, the Doge is elected by the Grand Council for life, although most Doges are elderly, so effective terms of office aren't as long as the life term might suggest. The Doge is responsible for making final decisions, setting policy, and appointing a number of civic officials.

Most of the government's day to day work, though, is performed by officers drawn from the Grand Council. The Council provides members for an endless stream of bureaucratic posts and ad-hoc assemblies: nominating committees, commissioners of police, war councils, tax collectors, investigating bodies, administrators of the Arsenal and other public facilities, and so on. Terms of service run from two months to a year, with individuals usually cycling through a number of positions.

One of the more ominous permanent committees is the Council of Ten. It was originally charged with overseeing exiles: making sure exiles stayed out of Venice, keeping an eye on their activities, and offering a bounty for exiles who appeared likely to take action against their home city. By the Renaissance, it has become a sort of secret police, prepared to take quick action against any threat of insurrection or improper political influence. The Council of Ten, which operates in secret, became increasingly powerful through the Renaissance and once even deposed a Doge.

Like many other early republics, Venice's elections consist of a mix of voting and randomness. For example, to elect a member of a civic office, a number of members of the Grand Council might be chosen by lot. Those councilors would agree on a group of twenty or thirty other councilors, who would be reduced by lot to something like half the original number. They in turn would choose members of a nominating committee, who would in turn be reduced by lot to a smaller body. Finally, their candidate would be presented to the Doge or the ducal council for approval.

As in other early republics, the elaborate procedures are meant to reduce tension between powerful families and other entrenched factions, and they seem to work better in Venice than in other cities. The men selecting nominating committees and potential officials take pains to make sure that all major factions are represented, and laws prohibit family members and business partners from working too closely in government or holding consecutive terms. In part, this can be attributed to Venice's tradition of loyalty to the city, something not so pronounced in other cities of the era.

It may also be attributed to the fact that the government of Venice is, far more than other cities, a money-making organization. The Venetian government takes great pains to funnel trade in the Adriatic and, to a lesser extent, the Mediterranean, through Venice itself and to safeguard its merchants. The government organizes shipping convoys, serves as a registry for mercantile contracts, provides investment opportunities, regulates port facilities, and even operates its own shipyard, the Arsenal. At its best, the government operates as a sort of cooperative mercantile venture and advocate for Venetian merchants abroad, devoted to making money for Venetians at the expense of other countries. Perhaps the universal desire for profit makes the Venetian government a bit more effective and less prone to uprisings than others of its era.

Venezia!: Role-Playing in Renaissance Venice

Economics and Industry

By the Renaissance, Venice's adventurous merchants, who traveled to far lands themselves to trade the goods of Europe for the treasures of the east, have largely been replaced by networks of merchant houses and local agents. The great merchant families maintain agents, usually members of the family, in foreign cities. Those agents keep up with local markets, make contracts, and trade goods shipped from Venice for locally available goods. A merchant family or partnership provides funding, and the local agent receives a share of the profits for goods that pass through his hands (five to ten percent is common). However, more adventurous merchants and independent traders might still travel to distant lands themselves to try to open new markets.

The main business of Venice is buying and selling. Vast shipments of all kinds of goods pass through the city's warehouses, from silk, medicines, and gemstones to wool and grain. In addition to vast amounts of distant foreign trade, Venice's iron grip on the northern and central Adriatic allows it to require merchants in the area to ship their goods through the city, where taxes are collected on every wholesale transaction. Opportunities to speculate in all kinds of goods abound, although the risks are considerable.

In addition to mercantile activity, Venice supports several thriving trades. Venice's ships, built both privately and in the Arsenal, are among the best of the era. In fact, in order to preserve its advantage, Venitians are prohibited from

selling their ships to foreigners unless they are old and dilapidated. In addition to shipwrights and related trades (carpentry, cooperage, rope-making, sail-making, etc.), the city also hosts textile workers, metalworkers, makers of soap and salt, and a considerable glass-blowing industry which survives to the present day. To reduce pollution and the risk of fire, glassblowing is restricted to the island of Murano, a short boat ride north of Venice itself.

Shipping

Shipping is the life-blood of Venice's mercantile economy. There are two large government-organized sets of convoys sailing to distant ports each year: one leaving at the end of winter and returning in late spring or early summer, the other leaving after midsummer and returning at the end of the fall. Convoys are formed mostly for self-protection. Individual ships might undertake their own journeys, but at their own risk of attack by pirates and enemies. Most convoys head east, but some go west as far as England and Holland. However, as Venice expands west, the westward sea lanes are supplanted in part by increasing overland trade through Germany and Switzerland.

The biggest ships are large galleys, with crews of 200 not being unusual and capacities up to 1000 tons; larger ships might not be able to enter the shallow lagoon. Ships of this size are government-owned, with captaincies auctioned off to qualified citizens each trading season. Galleys are somewhat faster on open seas than plain sailing vessels, far more maneuverable, particularly in port, and their large crews can be pressed into service to repel boarders, giving them considerable protection against attackers. In fact, any ship with a crew of less than sixty is legally considered unarmed. Even "round ships," purely sail-driven vessels, carry far more crew than their sails alone require. One crewman for every 5 or 10 tons is typical. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, round ships become better able to defend themselves because they can mount cannon more readily. However, with their superior speed and maneuverability, galleys remain the dominant military vessels through the period. At the beginning of the Renaissance, crews are almost entirely free Venetian sailors, but by the end, Venice must draw a number of sailors from other countries (mostly Greece and the Balkan coast) and some galleys are rowed by convicts.

Armed Forces

Venice is almost unique among Medieval and Renaissance cities for having no walls. It doesn't need any. It is protected by the lagoon and the most powerful navy of its time. There is no standing navy, but in time of war, Venice's large commercial fleets can be used as a fighting force. The same advantages the galleys have for shipping, they bring to warfare. Although regular sailors can fight, wearing leather armor and wielding swords, most of the fighting up to the beginning of boarding actions is done by archers using crossbows and wearing metal armor. Ships also start being armed with cannon during this period.

Ground forces, when they are employed, are mercenary armies. Mercenaries betray the Venetians less often than other cities; perhaps the Venetians pay better or just have a better understanding of the people they do business with. Admiralties and most naval captaincies are politically appointed, but mercenary armies are generally commanded in the field by their own officers.

News and Information

In Venice, news is regarded as a valuable commodity. Up-to-date knowledge of markets and political conditions in distant lands is a business tool, and Venetian merchants are willing to pay for it. Merchants might buy or sell recent letters from distant correspondents, and dispatches from admirals in the field are read aloud to paying audiences (the word "gazette" comes from the admission price, a small coin called a gazetta).

Of course, there is no way to absolutely control the spread of news. Drunken sailors happy to be in port could tell their tavern-mates about a battle or royal succession just as well as an official's report, and loose-tongued servants would just as gladly spread interesting tidbits among their friends. However, news in the streets is not as detailed as a written dispatch, and is likely colored by rumor and inaccurate repetition.

Religion

Like the rest of Italy, Venice is staunchly Catholic, avoiding much of the turmoil the Protestant Reformation is causing through the rest of Europe, but its Catholicism does not necessarily mean a close relationship with the Papacy. Sophisticated Venetians don't let religion get in the way of a good time. On the other hand, the Inquisition comes to Venice in the sixteenth century and makes life uncomfortable for many citizens in its pursuit of Protestant heresy.

During the last years of Byzantium, the exodus of Greeks from the crumbling empire means that Venice has a substantial minority of Orthodox Christians who meet with a friendly reception. The city has a small Jewish population as well. While they are not subjected to violent repression through most of the period and hold some respected jobs (Jewish physicians are highly regarded), Venice is nevertheless one of the first cities in Italy to confine its Jews to a ghetto. Indeed, the term "ghetto" comes from Ghetto Nuovo, the quarter of the city where Jews are confined.

While Venetian merchants deal with Muslims more than most Europeans because of their eastern trading colonies, those same colonies also put them on the front lines of frequent wars with the Turks. As a result, the Venetians have no special fondness for non-Christians. Still, they are not bigoted about it either; a Muslim visitor might be regarded with curiosity, but not overt hostility, particularly if he is an ambassador from Persia or some other potential ally against the Turks. Like Jews, Muslims were allowed to practice their religion openly.

Arts and Sciences

With its close ties to the east, Venice is an important conduit for the transmission of Classical learning back into Europe. This is particularly the case late in the fifteenth century, when the last wave of Byzantine scholars flee the final destruction of their empire at the hands of the advancing Ottoman Turks. Any text, particularly any Greek text, is likely to come through Venice.

Venice also hosts an important medical school and many prominent doctors. In other practical arts, it is an early adopter of many innovations in ship and sail design, and Venetian sailors are quick to grasp the advantages of the magnetic compass. Early models have a margin of error of several degrees, but can reliably be used to mark out sixteen cardinal points.

The city is home to a number of notable painters, including Titian, and sees visits by a number of important foreign artists, including Leonardo da Vinci. It is also a leader in printing books, and because of the importance of navigation, it is home to many cartographers. Venetians freely produce a surprising amount of sensuous, even blatantly erotic poetry and art, perhaps because the Inquisition is more worried about Lutheranism than sins of the flesh.

Clothing

Clothes are typical of the era for Italy in general: shoes or boots, hose, shirt, and a tight jacket or overshirt for men, multiple layers of gowns for women. Hats and long robes are commonly worn by both sexes. While Venice has a number of sumptuary laws prohibiting extravagant dress, those laws appear to have been completely ineffective. Venetian clothing is the height of fashion, using a huge range of colors, patterns, fabrics, and styles. There are certain class and occupational restrictions on clothing. Panderers and prostitutes must wear yellow, magistrates are supposed to wear somber-colored robes of office (black, red, or purple), and Jews must wear distinctive badges or hats (usually a yellow "O" or a red or yellow turban).

One of the best-known items of Venetian apparel is the mask. At least as early as the 1200's, Venetians took to wearing masks for festivals during Carnival, the series of celebrations leading up to the beginning of Lent. The wearing of masks, usually with oversized hooded black robes, is legally permitted for several periods during the year (spring after Lent into early summer, most of the fall, and winter until Lent) and at state events. Because of the obvious potential for mischief, a number of laws have been enacted against masqueraders visiting nuns and going to certain other public places. Given the number of laws, it seems likely that masks are, if not everyday wear, then at least

sufficiently common as not to be found unusual in public.

Buildings

As in most cities around the Mediterranean, the homes of Venice are mostly three or four stories tall, with courtyards and flat or slightly sloped roofs, and few corridors. The Venitians sometimes use flat rooftops as a venue for socializing. Like most buildings before artificial lighting, and even afterwards, homes and palaces are rarely more than two rooms deep. Every room has windows or some opening for natural light facing the street or an inner courtyard. The lower and middle classes tend to live in closely set houses that share side walls, much like modern urban row houses, or in apartment buildings sharing common entranceways and courtyards. Windows are high and narrow, and balconies are common.

Due to the inherent dampness, there is little or no mud brick construction. Rather, stone, brick, and wood are the main building materials. There is more wood construction in Venice than in most other Italian cities.

Ground floors tend to house kitchens, store rooms, servants quarters, and shops. If a house has a large common room, it is likely to be on the second story, with apartments on higher floors. Homes on a canal could conceivably have a sort of "garage" on the level of the canal, holding boats, and most have landings, with steps leading up to the "street" level.

Streets and Canals

The streets of Venice are mostly cobble-paved and named for professions ("Street of the Fullers") or saints. However, Venice is a city of more than just streets. Venice's canals are the remnants of the passages between the islands that came to make up the city itself, made narrow and regular by walls and deliberate dredging. In addition to the famous flat-bottomed gondolas, the Venetian canals see conventional rowboats and even small sailing vessels. Sections of the city separated by canals are linked by numerous bridges. Small boats are also used to reach the mainland, the Lido, and the other islands around the lagoon, so almost every Venetian is an occasional sailor.

Most Venetian bridges are not flat-surfaced. They are usually built on a single large arch high enough for a standing man on a boat to pass under. This usually means that the upper surface of the bridge has to be arched as well or, because of the steepness of the arch, stepped.

Food

Venetian cuisine benefits from being at the heart of the spice trade. Pepper, cinnamon, sugar, and other flavorings are still costly, but no one has better access to them than the Venetians. Sugar is starting to replace honey as a sweetener, giving rise to a broader range of confections, which are mostly based on fruit or almonds. At Venetian banquets, which can be quite sumptuous, cooks are beginning to think in terms of distinct courses which come in a specific order. Modern table manners are also starting coming into shape.

What To See and What To Do

The center of the Venetian business is the Rialto, a district built on the site of the city's founding, at the upper curve of the Grand Canal's backwards S, containing a small plaza, several churches, and a remarkable bridge. The bridge is wooden (the stone bridge there now is a post-Renaissance addition), covered, and steeply sloped like an inverse V. The point of the V, however, is split and movable, like a pair of drawbridges facing one another. Two small sections on either side at the top can be lifted to let tall-masted boats through. The region of the Rialto is where important news and announcements are publicly posted, many bankers do business (including a branch of the Medici bank), and the most important merchants gather to do business, share information, and gossip. To be exiled from the Rialto, a punishment for certain crimes, is one of the worst punishments that could be levied on a Venetian merchant.

While Venice's shore is surrounded by docks and landings, the most recognized landing is at the center of the south side of the city, just past the mouth of the Grand Canal: the San Marco. The Palazzo di San Marco, a painting of which seems to grace every Italian restaurant ever built, is a center of shipping and one of the first sights of the city to greet any visitor. It is also used by the Grand Council on the few occasions when they are convened. It is a large, somewhat blocky building decorated with long arched colonnades. After 1204, the San Marco was decorated by a statue of four horses, looted from the Hippodrome in Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade. The San Marco faces a large L-shaped piazza, which is also faced by the Ducal Palace, housing the offices of the Doge, a number of other government buildings, and the city's tallest bell tower.

The eastern end of Venice holds the city's famous government-owned industrial complex, the Arsenal. While the Arsenal is, in part, a factory and storehouse for weapons, its main purpose is as a shipyard. During the Renaissance, the Arsenal grew considerably from its original dimension to become perhaps the largest factory in the world of its time. The main structure is a large hollow rectangle. The center is flooded so that wood can be seasoned underwater and ships can be floated down a passage out to the lagoon. The Arsenal employs an average of 2000 men using a forerunner of modern mass production techniques, with teams building a part of a ship, then sending it on to be worked on by another team. The Arsenal is joined by the Tana to the south, another large pool, this one for preparing fibers for rope making.

For quiet contemplation, or simply quiet assignations, Venice is amply supplied with churches and convents, but no cemeteries. Land is too scarce in the city itself, so the small island of San Michele, between Venice and Murano, has been converted entirely into a cemetery. Just as Venice is packed with the living, San Michele is packed to capacity with individual crypts and family tombs.

Venice celebrates Carnival lavishly. Carnival was originally the ten days leading up to Shrove Tuesday, the day before the beginning of Lent and, in Catholic Europe, an excuse to throw riotous parties before forty days of general asceticism. In Venice, however, the period of reveling has come to begin at Christmas, building to its most fevered pitch the day before Lent. During Carnival, characters are likely to find masked revelers filling the streets, elaborately costumed parades (organized by semi-permanent clubs, which might have political affiliations as well), plays, fireworks (the Italians began to make fireworks of their own late in the Middle Ages, and Italian fireworks are the state of the art in Europe), and a general atmosphere of abandon.

But even outside of Carnival, it's easy to find a good time in Venice. Individual saints' days could have public or private festivals, and successful traders may informally celebrate their wealth. Taverns, courtesans, and semi-public parties aside, there's always people-watching. Wealthy young men formed *compagnie delle calze*, social clubs distinguished by colorful tights worn by members, and public processions provide frequent entertainment.

Venice in the Campaign

Venice makes an excellent base of operations for characters. It's a perfect home for a merchant adventurer or political intrigue campaign, and combat-oriented characters can fight Venice's enemies in northern Italy, the Balkans, and at sea (closer to home, inventive duelists can fight across rooftops, balconies, streets, and canals). In a fantasy campaign, Venice would be a source of magical texts and magical materials. Here are some other ways you can fit Venice into a campaign:

- **Diplomacy:** The year is 1468, and Venice is near the height of its power and wealth, but wants more. Seeking to expand holdings on the Balkan peninsula, the Doge invites a powerful warlord to Venice in hopes of striking an alliance against the Turks. The characters must bring the visitor to their side and protect hm from potential threats: Turkish agents, agents of his own rivals, and perhaps even Venetians more interested in expanding west than east. And the Balkan warlord? Perhaps it's Vlad Tepes, who may want to elude his protectors for dark purposes of his own. . .
- **Conspiracy:** The Inquisition. The Council of Ten. Lost knowledge returning from the East. People wearing masks. If you can't get an illuminated conspiracy out of that, you're just not trying.
- **Industrial Espionage:** The characters are engaged as spies to discover the secrets of a glassmaker who is producing ever finer and clearer glass. Since trade secrets are always passed down by direct teaching and never

written down, they must find a way to infiltrate the glassmaker's workshop and observe him long enough to figure out what he does. And what will they find when they do? A devil living in the crucible? An alien trying to bootstrap Venice's glassblowing technology to the point where he can replace vital fiber optics in his badly damaged spacecraft?

Further Reading

- *Venice, A Maritime Republic*, Frederic Lane.
- *Cultural Alas of the Renaissance*, C. F. Black et al. (eds.)
- *A Guide To Venetian Domestic Architecture*, Egle Trincanato.
- Dangerous Beauty (dir. Marshall Herskovitz), a tale of a courtesan in sixteenth century Venice, filmed on location. Excellent costumes and period music, with a surprisingly plausible improvisational poetry and swashbuckling interlude.
- http://www.tin.it/veniva/venetie/ In Italian, but a remarkable resource. This site is a web-based reproduction of Jacopo de' Barbari's stunning veduta, a detailed "aerial view" of the city drawn in 1500. Follow the "La Veduta" link or go to http://www.tin.it/veniva/venetie/map/map.htm to go directly to the map. Clicking on the map will bring up increasingly detailed sections.

Venezia!: Role-Playing in Renaissance Venice

Legend

1. Grand Canal
2. San Marco
3. Arsenal and Tana
4. Rialto
5. Ghetto Nuovo
6. San Michele
7. Murano

JPG map of Venezia - [65K]

War of Future Past: Reality Futura

"We Futurists ... seek to realize this total fusion in order to reconstruct the universe making it more joyful, in other words by a complete re-creation. We will give skeleton and flesh to the invisible, the impalpable, the imponderable and the imperceptible. We will find abstract equivalents for every form and element in the universe, and then we will combine them according to the caprice of our inspiration, creating plastic complexes which we will set in motion."
-- Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero, "Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe" (1915)

Call it a Worked Example for a nonexistent **GURPS Electropunk**, or an Alternate Artistic Earth -- Reality Futura welds the Futurist "road not taken" of modern art onto an inverted World War Two. In this reality, technology, politics, and even strategy are driven by artistic axioms behind the sooty scrim of the material world. The mood is intense action, arcing ahead on the sound of horns and motors. The world may be dystopian, but it's a dystopia on fast-forward. Futurist adventures should be cinematic, over-the-top tales of epic antiheroism; Ayn Rand on crystal meth or Jack London on crack. It's Tim Burton's *Speed Racer*, it's Fritz Lang's *Star Wars* -- it's the World War of the Future!

"The red holidays of genius have begun! There is nothing for us to admire today but the dreadful symphonies of the shrapnels and the mad sculptures that our inspired artillery molds among the masses of the enemy."
-- Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "War, the World's Only Hygiene" (1915)

Millions of men, and millions more robots and mechani, grapple in furious combat across the globe. Japanese otaku splinter American ray-stations in Mexico, Free French railgun batteries fire ballistic shells across the Sahara into Italian radium-stations, the unstoppable Mechanikerwaffen of the North German Republic stride across the Russian prairie in search of armored behemoths to destroy, British and Italian jets duel as their skydromes take position over the Pyramids. No continent on Earth remains silent; the whirring dielectrics, the chattering railguns, the stomp and crash of mechani and behemoths, the whine of robotic servos and the shouts of paratroopers can break out anywhere from Saigon to Seattle. Right now, although the battle lines remain fluid, the Allies struggle to hold Egypt and Turkey in the west and Bengal and Mongolia in the east. Australia and Britain hold out, and the Americas have felt only lightning raids -- so far. The Futurist powers rule the Mediterranean and the China Seas, all of Europe and much of Africa. Where exactly the lines across the Pacific and the Atlantic, or through the Russian steppes or the Chinese hills, might run not even the orbital stations know -- a hundred miles might fall to air assault and bootstrap a mechani strike still deeper, only to be cut off by skip-ships caroming off the upper atmosphere and chopping them up with T-Rays and kinetic harpoons.

"The utter antithesis between the modern world and the old is determined by all those things that formerly did not exist. Our lives have been enriched by elements the possibility of whose existence the ancients did not even suspect. Men have identified material contingencies, and revealed spiritual attitudes, whose repercussions are felt in a thousand ways."
-- Antonio Sant'Elia, "Manifesto of Futurist Architecture" (1914)

The future didn't use to look like this. 85 years ago, back in 1870, when Baron Hausmann's Aerial Engineers and the frenetic hammering of the mitrailleuse shut down Bismarck's imperial dream, Europe thought that the world had been made safe from war. They hadn't reckoned on the mad mania of King William II, on British indolence, or on the Polish revolution in Russia that paralyzed the Eastern Front while the Prussian armored behemoths rolled into Flanders in der Vergeltungskrieg -- the Vengeance War. Prussian zeppelins carried Lenin and Trotsky into Russia, collapsing that Empire for good, and almost starved Britain into submission until the new nerve tonics (and the American leviathan subs) came into wide production. In 1916, when Italy joined the Entente Powers and President Roosevelt brought the Americans in, the Prussian cause was doomed, regardless of how much of France they held.

The postwar dislocations, however, upset the brief era of Entente peace. As the mechanical men developed for wartime production moved into civilian work, they spawned mobs of unemployed (and angry) veterans. The harnessing of radium power and dielectrics threw more sectors of the economy into ruin. In France, the Imperial government fell to the Popular Front; in Britain, the Labour government put down a Nationalist General Strike only by the most extreme and brutal measures. Russia drowned in a welter of civil war, and the Balkans and Germanies were in chaos. In 1919,

famed poet, aviator, and war hero Gabriele d'Annunzio took 300 men into the Adriatic city of Fiume, siezing it as the first Futurist Republic. By 1922, all Italy followed him. Futurism seemingly held the answers; unlimited use of autofactories, of robot workers, of aerial trade fleets and radium power drew Italy into the first rank of nations with cometary speed. Italian banks and conglomerates financed the North German Republic, restoring order to Central Europe. Communist Bavaria and Hungary were suddenly isolated, overthrown, then added to the Futurist camp. When nationalists assassinated King Alexander of Yugoslavia, Britain and France stepped in to keep the Balkans from following the Germanies into the Italian sphere. In 1939, Italian paratroopers landed in Sarajevo in response to a "request" from the Futurist faction in Bosnia, and the Future War erupted.

"We will sing of great crowds excited by work, by pleasure, and by riot; we will sing of the multicolored, polyphonic tides of revolution in the modern capitals; we will sing of the vibrant nightly fervor of arsenals and shipyards blazing with violent electric moons; greedy railway stations that devour smoke-plumed serpents; factories hung on clouds by the crooked lines of their smoke; bridges that stride the rivers like giant gymnasts, flashing in the sun with a glitter of knives; adventurous steamers that sniff the horizon; deep-chested locomotives whose wheels paw the tracks like the hooves of enormous steel horses bridled by tubing; and the sleek flight of planes whose propellers chatter in the wind like banners and seem to cheer like an enthusiastic crowd."
-- Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909)

President Lindbergh had many reasons to keep out of the war, not the least of which was Senator LaGuardia's pro-Futurist bloc. But rivalry with Italy's ally Japan led to war in the Pacific, and when Japanese otaku launched their deadly torpedoes at Manila Bay and Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the Future War became a World War. The Japanese had already combined forces with Italy for deep airstrikes into the Soviet Union, but Premier Lunacharsky had absorbed the practical lessons of Futurism well. Hidden geothermal-powered autofactories all across Siberia built mechanical miners, turning veins of iron ore into steel behemoths in inexhaustible quantities. Soviet "Comintern Brigades" drop from the skies into Franco's Spain, Pilsudski's Poland, Mannerheim's Finland, or Peron's Argentina, reprogramming Futurist robots and sabotaging autofactories. Although Guderian's divisions carved great swaths out of Russia's western flank, the Soviets remain stubbornly unkillable. Chancellor Speer has, however, managed to make the North German Republic a partner rather than a satellite in the Futurist Axis; by cleverly encouraging his top mechani designers, he's given the Wehrmacht more punching power than any similarly sized ground force despite its relative weakness in behemoths and artillery.

"[W]e must prepare for the imminent, inevitable identification of man with motor, facilitating and perfecting a constant interchange of intuition, rhythm, instinct, and metallic discipline. . . This nonhuman and mechanical being, constructed for an omnipresent velocity, will be naturally cruel, omniscient, and combative."
-- Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "Multiplied Man and the Reign of the Machine" (1911)

The mechani on the Eastern Front plug into towering hulks with railgun arms and fascia-mounted T-Ray projectors. These iron giants have the advantage of speed, maneuverability, and range on even top-line Soviet behemoths. Most other nations' mechani go the conventional route of normal-scale titanium arms and legs, powered either by bionic dielectrics or (in experimental cases) radium capsules. These mechani serve as commandos, shock troops, and rangers -- and the number of infantrymen who lose limbs to artillery fire or incoming airstrikes keeps the potential mechani recruit pool high. Some Japanese, British, and Italian jets have plug-in mechani pilots who can withstand steeper dives or tighter turns than even the most chemically-enhanced Soviet or Brazilian fliers.

"From space man stole electricity and combustible fuels to transform motors into faithful allies. Man forced vanquished metals, rendered flexible with fire, to ally themselves with the fuels and electricity. He thus assembled an army of slaves, hostile and dangerous, but sufficiently tamed to transport him rapidly over the curves of the Earth."
-- Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "The New Religion-Morality of Speed" (1916)

American fliers depend on the thin wedge of American aeronautical design superiority, as Biefeld P-39 Mantas launched from the skydrome *Lakehurst* penetrated deep enough to firebomb Nagoya, and the Hughes P-49 Buffalo jets have closed the firepower gap with the He-144 ornithopter gunship. This dependence has cost them dearly at times. When a wing of American Biefeld-Brown dielectric B-21 bomber disks encountered a mixed squadron of Italian Coanda Raptors and North German Ju-290 Flugelräders on the disastrous Dakar Raid, it prevented any cross-Atlantic

strike in 1943. It did, however, encourage American development of the Goddard tropospheric skip-ship, and by 1944 it, the German Sänger-Bredt "antipodal bomber," and the Italian Cattaneo-Gusalli "condor" skip-ship contested the tropopause and near space. Italian supreme commander Italo Balbo and American aeronaval commander Robert A. Heinlein have now bent their every resource to capturing the Moon and the ultimate high ground.

" We stand on the last promontory of the centuries! . . . Why should we look back, when what we want is to break down the mysterious doors of the Impossible? Time and Space died yesterday. We already live in the absolute, because we have created eternal, omnipresent speed."
-- Filippo Tomasso Marinetti, "The Founding and Manifesto of Futurism" (1909)

For the curious, Reality Futura is a Quantum 4 world, midway between Reich-5 from **GURPS Alternate Earths** and Homeline. Like Gernsback, its feel depends heavily not only on alternate physical laws but on **TORG**-like alternate social axioms. Whether Futura truly owes its nature to fluke quantum fluctuations during the Big Bang, to the effects of Tesla's experimentation with mental projection in 1908, to works of artistic genius echoing back and forth through the timeline, or to the whims of the Unguessable Eddorean Temporal Masterminds is up to the GM. All you have to do is think fast, shoot to vaporize -- and Look To The Future!

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Know Thyself, Or Else!

[Scene: A generic apartment. There is a knock at the door. BOB opens the door, and sees his friend EDDY.]

BOB: Hey, Eddy. What's up?

EDDY: Hey, Bob! I'm going to play racquetball! Want to come?

BOB: No, thanks. I'm awful at racquetball. I have the coordination of an ebolic walrus, one of my legs is six inches shorter than the other so I always fall over, and my father was killed in the Racquetball Riots of '88.

EDDY: Oh, come on! It will be fun!

BOB: No, I'm pretty certain it won't.

EDDY: Yes, it will! Join me!

[BOB accompanies EDDY to play racquetball. BOB hobbles around not unlike an ebolic walrus, falls over, and eventually weeps hysterically as he remembers the Riots.]

EDDY: Boy, that was awful! Why'd you come with me anyway, Bob?

[Fade to black]

In the writerly biz, we call that an allegory. Or maybe it's an analogy. Or possibly an allergic parabola. Anyway, the point is, I'm trying to come up with a roundabout way of teaching a lesson.

[Last week](#) I talked a bit about fixing games that were close to perfect for you; this week I'm talking about avoiding games that are far from perfect for you.

It seems obvious: if you don't like a certain kind of game, don't play it. But I can't tell you how many games I've seen hindered or even ruined because one of the players simply didn't like the basic game. I spent an hour counseling a GM one time about a player who wasn't having fun with his *Call of Cthulhu* game, before spending two minutes with the player. You guessed it; the player simply didn't like horror RPGs.

At the risk of belaboring the obvious: know what you like, and know what you *won't* like. If you don't like complex strategy games, then avoid the *TacticsTome 2000* game. If you don't like moody combat-light games, then don't buy the *WallowAngst Live Action Game*. If you like optimistic settings, stay away from the *All Superheroes Have Cancer! RPG*.

To be fair, there are many games that have the potential to be enjoyed by just about everyone. *Dungeons & Dragons* works well enough as an epic *Dragonlance* setting, a grim 'n' gritty *Dark Sun* world, or even 1890's *Masque of the Red Death* gothic horror. [Cheapass Games](#) has made a name for itself by publishing games with a broad appeal. Many games can have sections that appeal to different people, like a combat-heavy world that has a lot of political intrigue. And I also believe that, in the world of RPGs, a good GM can make almost *any* system fun. But that fun is made a lot more challenging when the base premise of the game is disliked by one or more players (or [egad!] the GM).

So, be honest with your players and yourself about what you're able to put up with, and what you aren't. If a game would be great for you except for a few rules quirks or a minor problem with the setting, try to fix it or come up with a solution that would be liked by everyone. If, on the other hand, you might be interested in *Vampire* if only there weren't all these darn vampires, then maybe you'd be better off suggesting a different game to your group. One GM friend of mine recently told me about how he polled his players regarding which system they would play next. They eventually agreed on *Castle Falkenstein*. Ironically, it wasn't anyone's first choice, but it was everyone's second choice. And that, in my opinion, is a lot healthier than playing the game that was the first choice of a few people, and the last

choice of the others.

And if you're ever in the mood to play racquetball, let me know. . . so I can hide.

* * *

Steven's Fading Suns Rules Mod

*(If you don't have any interest in **Fading Suns**, this is almost certain to bore you. Why not reread the previous section? There were a few funny bits in there.)*

I'm beginning to realize that if, in the middle of a 5,000 word article about the World War II, I were to make an aside about, say, how we used to transform our *Star Wars* action figures into breakdancers, I'd get no comments about the 4,980 words *not* about breakdancing Stormtroopers, and forty e-mails wanting diagrams. Okay; for the dozen or so folks who inquired *how* I had modified *Fading Suns*, here we go.

From the beginning I'd noticed the similarities between *Fading Suns* and White Wolf's *Storyteller* systems. Besides having several writers & artists in common, the base system had many of the same characteristics. You roll to receive a number of successes, the number of which is (roughly) determined by your attribute and skills; the higher the number of successes, the better you did. The *Fading Suns* scale seemed to be roughly double the White Wolf scale; the maximum (normal) attribute or skill in *Fading Suns* is 10, while the maximum in *Storyteller* is 5.

The problem was that we came to *Fading Suns* after a three-year *Storyteller* campaign. In *Storyteller*, with its handful of d10s, you were reasonably assured of *some* success; an average person has a 75% of marginally succeeding at a task in the base system. In contrast, in *Fading Suns* you were lucky if you received *any* successes; it uses one d20, which provides for a wide variance. Thus an average person has a 70% of *failing* a task. Unfortunately, the higher the skills are, the greater the absurdity. In *Storyteller* a great violinist (4 each in Attribute and Skill) has about a 1% of outright failing (this is rough math, so don't yell at me too much if it's wrong); in *Fading Suns* a great violinist (8 each in Attribute and Skill) has a 20% of failing. . . with a quarter of those failures being catastrophic. Even worse, *Fading Suns* doesn't have much allowance for ensuring successes; if you *are* a great violinist, then 20% of the time you're going to perform barely satisfactorily.

We didn't like this.

(Warning: For those of you who've been following along but don't play *Fading Suns*, I'm about to slip into pure gameese.)

The fix I came up with was this: allow post-roll Accenting.

I reasoned this: Almost no one did pre-roll accenting in our group, since the Negative chart was too restrictive (even if you *could* be assured of success, it's in all likelihood going to be a marginal success), and positive accenting was *way* too risky. . . you're going to fail even *more* often.

Also, other game systems do just fine letting players modify rolls afterwards. (*Torg/Masterbook*, *Star Wars*, *DC Heroes*, just to name a few.)

Restrictions

- Accenting still costs a Wyrd.
- For Negative Accenting you use the Negative Accenting chart. For Positive Accenting you use the Regular Success (*not* the Positive Accenting) chart. In other words, the only way to get the Positive Accenting chart is to accent *before* the roll and take your chances. Likewise, if you negatively accent to turn a failure into a success, then you're not getting the full benefit of your almost-good-enough roll.
- You can only post-roll accent plus or minus your skill or controlling attribute (instead of your skill alone as per

normal accenting rules). If you don't have the skill, you can't accent.

- You can't accent up or down to a critical success; if you accent to your goal number, it's treated as a standard goal number.
- 19 is still a failure; 20 is still a critical failure.

(As an aside, we had already been using a rule that said that a critical success was when you rolled your skill plus attribute; if you have a Stamina of 5 and a Vigor of 3, you Critically Succeed on an 8, even if there's a -10 penalty or a +10 bonus. Yes it makes a few weird results, but the bookkeeping is a **lot** easier.)

After playtesting this a bit, we found it works *quite* well. For a number of times a day equal to your Wyrd (three to eight, for most starting characters), you can be more assured of doing what you want. If you're good at something, you can make sure you succeed, or do better if you only marginally succeeded. If you're okay at something, you now have a much better chance at succeeding. If you're awful at something, you'll still be awful at it, but if you got *close* to succeeding, now you'll be able to sometimes marginally succeed.

It's more heroic/cinematic, to be sure, but that's how we've been treating the game world anyway. Now we don't live in fear when someone goes to pull the Abort Planetary Destruct Lever. And the bad guys can post-roll accent too, making them a lot more challenging; a group of ten bad guys can accent a lot more rolls than the player characters.

* * *

All right; for the 95% of you who don't play ***Fading Suns***, welcome back. Next week I think I'll dip into my mailbag. As ever, feel free to [drop me a line](.).

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Get Out!***, Comic Page card

(Three stars) "There's little that can be said about the legendary Tor Johnson, except that he was a big, scary-looking guy."

The Complete Pinhead's Guide to Are We Having Fun Yet? in INWO

by Darrin Bright

With a few exceptions, timing in *Illuminati: New World Order* is generally pretty simple. The [INWO VFAQ](#) does a very nice job of explaining issues like canceling and speed-play. In general, cards take effect in the order in which they are played, and all actions take effect first before you can cancel them. But there are a few gaping holes that pop up when certain plots are played. Specifically, I'm talking about Are We Having Fun Yet?, often abbreviated AWHFY. Here's a quick look at the card, if you're not familiar with it.

> **AWHFY:**
> Play this card at any time. It requires an action by group(s) with total Power greater than that of the target. One action or special-ability use of the target is canceled.

I tried (and failed) to tackle this problem before, and some of you may already be familiar with a long rambling piece I wrote called ["The Remains of The Somewhat Complete Guide to All The Fun You Can Have with 'Are We Having Fun Yet?' But Were Afraid To Ask."](#) It was an attempt to sort out for myself what was going on with some rulings that had to do with special abilities and timing issues. If you haven't read it yet, you might want to take a look at it, but it's not necessary to be familiar with it for the purposes of this article. (If you tried to read it, lose 1d6 SAN.) I don't think even I understood what it was about and it didn't reach any meaningful conclusions, so I'll just give you a quick recap:

"The Remains. . . " was principally concerned with the rulings mess on what is or is not a special ability, an instruction, or a limitation. (It's still a mess, but we've managed to cope.) It started out as an attempt to classify all identifiable special abilities into five different categories, but as the article meandered onwards, I discovered that there were only two kinds of special abilities. The first kind is activated when specific events occurred, such as spending a token or announcing an attack. The second kind are continuous abilities that have no particular duration and stay in effect all of the time. This second group was where the first article really fell apart, since it's not clear how long the cancellation lasts if you hit these groups with AWHFY.

It did occur to me at that point, though, that my problem wasn't AWHFY or special abilities or instructions or whatever. It seemed to me the whole thing depended on how time is divided in *INWO*. When "continuous effects" are canceled, how long do they stay canceled? Until the next event, or the end of the phase, or the end of the turn? And what the heck was an "event" anyway? Was an attack one single event, or a group of events? Uh, your eyes are starting to glaze over. . . maybe I should get to the point.

The Gnomes Problem

When I first considered immunity as a special ability, I thought it was
a continuous effect, as in it was active all the time. The Discordia
ruling didn't work that way, however. When you cancel Discordia's
immunity during an attack, it only lasts long enough for one single
Straight or Government group to interfere, then that counts as "one
single use" of Discordia's power and it goes back into effect. (The ***INWO*** VFAQ discusses this under Canceling -
Special Abilities, but uses the Vatican as an example.) Aha, I told myself, immunity isn't a continuous effect, it is only
activated when a group attacks or interferes in an attack. It was at this point that I discovered that my neat little five
categories were actually only two categories: event-based abilities and continuous abilities.

But wait, I thought to myself. If immunity isn't continuous, maybe those other powers aren't continuous either. Maybe
they only look like they're continuous. If I could classify all powers as taking effect on a particular event or under
certain conditions, then it would be perfectly clear how AWHFY works with ALL special abilities. It would be one
grand unified theory on how all events work in ***INWO***. It would clear up all the confusing timing and event issues, it
would bring about world peace, it would get me to clean the house!

At that point I ran into the Gnomes Problem, and the whole thing fell apart. Here's a look at the special ability I was
puzzling over.

> **Gnomes of Zurich:**
> You may hold 6 plots in your hand, rather than the usual 5.

When I tried to wrap my little mind around the timing of this particular ability, everything went to pieces. When you
cancel this ability, it immediately goes back into effect, right? The duration is pretty much infinite. As long as the
Gnomes are playing they may hold up to six plot cards. It wasn't a power that was activated or happened under certain
circumstances, it was a change to the basic rules of the game and there was no clear answer about how long it would
stop working if it were canceled. Until the end of the phase? Until the end of the turn? I had no idea, so I gave up.

The Yeti Ruling

When the SubGenius expansion was released, one of the new cards that attracted a lot of attention was the Arise! goal. One of the first tricks people came up with was "attack to control all my groups, and we'll share a victory." But who wants to share a victory when you can get all the glory yourself? I set about the problem of tricking an opponent or at least crediting an opponent with taking away your last group.

What I came up with was Deck of the Week winner #61, "Somebody Kill Me, Please!" It's a fairly simple deck, really. Move all your groups onto the Center for Disease Control, attack to destroy a rival's place with biological warfare, and make sure the attack fails. When the CDC is destroyed and your rival is credited with the kill, reveal Arise! and win.

One of the problems with the deck, however, was the CDC didn't have an open control arrow to accept any puppets. But that wasn't a problem for the Yetis. They can attach themselves as a puppet to any group, whether or not it has an open control arrow. Only at the last minute I realized one of the cards I'd put into the deck could have ruined the whole thing. The Blue NWO: World Hunger strips the action tokens from green groups and nullifies their special abilities. . . and the Yetis were green! If World Hunger was played, the deck might not work.

Or would it? I told Deck of the Week Guru Ralph Melton to substitute Global Warming for World Hunger in the final deck submission, but the two of us puzzled over what, exactly, would happen if somebody *did* play World Hunger or somehow canceled the Yetis special ability. Let's say the Yetis are hanging off somewhere, minding their own business, and all of a sudden they're not supposed to hang there anymore. What happens? Do you have to move them immediately, or do you have to discard them because they are in play in an illegal position?

> **Yetis:**
> This card may be placed on any side of its master's card, even if there is no outgoing control arrow there! A group with an unused, but blocked, control arrow may attack to control the Yetis.

After puzzling over it, Ralph put forth the following interpretation. The Yetis special ability is only activated when they are actually placed in a power structure. Once in play, they stay there until moved, and canceling their special ability has no effect, since there's no rule that says they have to be discarded once they've legally made it into play.

Weird, huh? I thought it was a pretty wacky interpretation, but Head Netrep and *INWO* Goddess Lynette Cowper agreed with him and made it official. So once a group is in play, it doesn't matter if it's actually on an open control arrow so long as it got there legally. I called it a rather pnambic ruling, but let it go. . . there are worse rulings I can rant and rave about.

But to get back to our little story, that ruling got me thinking. Here was another apparently continuous ability that wasn't continuous at all. And you could cancel it with AWHFY, if it was played just after the Yetis were placed in play. I decided to tackle the Gnomes Problem again.

The Gnomes Solution

Inspired by the Yeti ruling, it eventually occurred to me that the Gnomes special ability is *not* continuous. The Yeti ruling actually has nothing to do with the Gnomes solution. . . it's just that I was thinking about the Yetis just before I figured out how to handle the Gnomes problem. It occurred to me that the Gnomes special ability is only in use when they have more than five plots in their hand. Once the

Gnomes special ability is canceled via AWHFY, the Gnomes player has to discard down to five cards. . . at which point the special ability is no longer active. It's only activated when a sixth card is drawn, and it stays active until his next turn comes up or he's forced to play or discard a card. If canceled, the Gnomes player discards down to five plots. If he does draw another card, then his special ability goes back into effect, but it is considered a separate use of this special ability.

The Ross Perot Problem

I was close. I almost had it. Only one serious obstacle remained that I could see, but it was Ross Perot, which leads to a very nasty little rules conundrum with the Dittoheads. Actually, I'm not going to even touch that problem in this article, since it doesn't exactly involve AWHFY or timing. Well, it kind of does, as I want to talk about the special abilities that create the paradox, but that's as far as I'm going to go. There's actually probably a lot more quasi-continuous abilities out there that I'm ignoring, but I thought I'd try to keep this article out of the "multiple volume" length, so I'm going to pretend it's the last obstacle.

Ross Perot and the Saturday Morning Cartoons add to or change the alignments of their puppets. The Dittoheads, Day Care Centers, and Secret FisTemples also change alignments, but these three groups actually copy the alignments of their masters. Although these two types of groups seem to have similar abilities, only Ross Perot and the Saturday Morning Cartoons actually have special abilities. The ***INWO* VFAQ** points out that the alignment-changing of the Dittoheads is actually an instruction, so it can't be canceled with AWHFY and I'm not going to worry about it here.

> **Ross Perot:**
> Any group controlled by Perot immediately becomes Straight and Conservative, losing any Weird or Liberal alignments it had. This is a "permanent" change, but the alignments will revert to normal if the group gets another master.

There are two ways to interpret Ross Perot's special ability. The first is similar to the Yeti ruling and is based on the wording "This is a "permanent" change." If it's permanent then it only needs to be done once, right? It works the same way as playing Straighten Up and Fundie Money on the group. Like the Yetis, the ability is activated only when Ross gets a new puppet and if it isn't canceled immediately at that point then it's permanent and can't be canceled later.

I conferred with the Secret Masters and they didn't like this interpretation, although some of them conceded that the reasoning was technically sound. But there's no way to foil a victory attempt if Ross' owner is winning with an alignment-based goal, and it doesn't make much sense if you can't cancel something that can obviously be used more than once. If the ability actually was canceled, then that puppet would never be Straight or Conservative unless it was moved to another one of Ross' control arrows, which doesn't make much sense either. And so it was decided that this interpretation was incorrect.

The second and correct interpretation is much similar to the Discordian immunity ruling. Let's say Ross' puppets can call on his special ability to change alignments whenever they need to. Even if it is canceled Ross will just change the alignments back to Straight and Conservative later when he or his puppets act again. It just happens that way and we're not going to worry about why or how long it lasts. Well, to play AWHFY on him when he takes over a group now is pretty pointless, since the next time any of his puppets act they'll be Straight and Conservative again. With this interpretation, you can only actually cancel Ross' ability if he or his puppets are trying to *do* something with it, either to spend a token or claim victory via an alignment-based goal. Just so we know exactly what's going on, let's take a

look at some examples.

Ross has control of California, and California wants to aid an attack to control the Tobacco Companies. Since California is using the Straight alignment to aid the attack, you could cancel Ross' ability to give them the Straight alignment, and California's token would be lost as an illegal action. Actually, you could cancel California's token directly by using AWHFY, but Ross generally has a lower power than California and it's probably cheaper to use AWHFY on him.

Here's a stickier problem, though. . . let's say someone has played Fundie Money on the Tobacco Companies, making them Conservative. California now has two matching alignments. If Ross' ability is canceled, are both alignment changes canceled or only one? If only one, then which one? Actually, I'm not sure what happens in this case, but I'm going to guess that both alignment changes are part of the same special ability, so California is neither Straight nor Conservative until it can act again. I won't get bent out of shape if you feel differently though.

Finally, let's take a look at a victory attempt. Ross has control of two groups that are not normally Conservative and you're trying to win with the Let Them Eat Cake goal. You've destroyed 2 Liberal groups, and due to Ross' special ability you now have 7 Conservative groups when a rival plays AWHFY on Ross. Since you're using those Conservative groups to claim victory, your rivals can cancel Ross' ability for that victory attempt. But now the question is how many Conservative groups count? Actually, one of them does and one of them doesn't. Since Ross controls two groups, his special ability is being used twice, and AWHFY can only cancel one use for that particular victory attempt. Your rivals would have to play two AWHFY plots on you to affect both puppets.

Conclusions

Well, if you made it this far, this should just about wrap up everything you need to know about Are We Having Fun Yet?. It's not quite the End-All Be-All Grand Unified Theory of *INWO* Timing Issues, but it might be pretty close. To sum up, I submit to you the following: All special abilities in INWO are activated when specific events or conditions occur, and they can be canceled at that time by playing AWHFY. There are no continuous special abilities in *INWO* that are "always active", and all abilities have some sort of specific duration.

There's one last thing I want to clear up with AWHFY. Some of you may be wondering what happens when AWHFY is played on a card with a special ability that is not currently being used or activated. Some of you may be thinking, okay, well, the *next* use of that ability is canceled, right?

Wrong, and here I just want to clear up how timing works in *INWO* when you want to cancel something. In *INWO*, all events happen first, then you decide if you want to cancel them or not. The classic example discussed in the World Domination Handbook is Discordia giving the NPCs (Nuclear Power Companies) the Government alignment. In order to cancel Discordia's action, you have to wait until it happens first. Once the NPCs have become Government, however, Discordia is now immune to them and they can't cancel the change of alignments.

AWHFY works the same way. You can't use it on anything that hasn't happened yet. So if you play it on Ross Perot when he has no puppets and Ross isn't trying to do anything, it has no effect. With nothing to cancel, AWHFY was played illegally and is discarded along with any tokens spent to power it.

So, no longer need you fear the Card That Cannot Be Named or flee the *INWO* Mailing List when it is mentioned. You can stride confidently into any rules argument and know that yes, there should be some way to resolve it without going insane. Of course, due to the "generally beneficial" OPEC/Moonbase rulings, we have no ferk-blast-it clue what is or is not a special ability, limitation, or instruction without consulting a Netrep, but that's a horse of a different color. . . and not really one of the concerns of this article. But that shouldn't stop you from having a little fun with AWHFY.

Pyramid Review

Aberrant: Worldwide Phase I

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

by R. Sean Bergstrom, Deird're Brooks, Steve Kenson and John Snead

160 pages, $21.95

Aberrant: Worldwide Phase I is the first collection of scenarios published for
White Wolf's superheroic *Aberrant* game. The book is noteworthy on a number of
levels, not least of which being that it's a collection of adventures. Over the past few
years, adventure collections have fallen into disfavor for many game lines. While I understand the factors that led to
this situation, it's nevertheless frustrating. Many games - *Aberrant* among them - have idiosyncratic enough settings
that adventures serve the useful purpose of providing some idea of how to use them. Even in this day and age, Game
Masters appreciate a little guidance on just what to do with their cool new game. Given that the scenarios included in
Aberrant: Worldwide are actually quite enjoyable to boot, White Wolf deserves some appreciation.

The first of the four scenarios, "Strange Bedfellows," centers on the US presidential election of 2008. Like the others
in the book, this adventure advances the *Aberrant* timeline, enabling the players to participate in the evolution of the
setting. Such metaplots are a staple (some would say bane) of roleplaying games these days. What's remarkable about
this scenario (and the others that follow) is that players truly can participate in them. They're not just set pieces in
which Great Events happen around characters who have no ability to influence them. Instead, *Aberrant: Worldwide*
provides plenty of information on the many possible endings of each scenario, including their long-term effects on the
Aberrant setting. Admittedly, each scenario has a default ending that White Wolf will follow in future products. Yet,
the book provides sufficient detail (several pages in some cases) on other options that going against the canonical
outcome is actually a viable alternative.

"Strange Bedfellows" begins as the United States gets its first nova presidential candidate, the quantum-powered
"Fireman," Randel Portman. Player characters can participate in this open-ended scenario in a variety of ways. They
can support Portman's bid, oppose it, or even launch their own campaign! The scenario provides a great deal of
information on the American political process. Everything from political parties to special interest groups to opinion
polls are covered in sufficient detail for the Storyteller to play out this story. "Strange Bedfellows" sets the tone for the
rest of the book. It makes it clear that the Aberrant setting will change and develop and that the actions of the
characters have consequences.

The second scenario, "Apostasy," chronicles the defection of a powerful nova from the fold of Project Utopia. The
nova in question, Antaeus, is the mastermind behind Utopia's terraforming projects in places like Ethiopia.
Consequently, his defection is a blow to the prestige of the Project and presages its eventual fall from grace. The
players enter into the adventure as agents of one of several groups determined to bring Antaeus into their fold (or
return him to it in the case of Utopia).

The third scenario, "Gabriel," has the potential to shake up any Aberrant series. The adventure revolves around the
machination of an insane and extremely powerful nova, the eponymous Gabriel. Gabriel is one of the first novas to
succumb to the quantum taint that inevitably afflicts all novas as they gain greater levels of power. Gabriel is now
hopelessly deranged, believing himself an agent of God intent on ridding the world of its ills. Unfortunately for
baseline humanity, his plan calls for the release of a plague that could wipe out much of the world's non-nova
population. The characters must, of course, stop him before it's too late.

The final scenario, "Into the Arms of the Angel of Wrath," concludes the mystery behind the murder of the nova Jennifer Landers. This murder, first described in the Aberrant rule book, is a central element of the unfolding plotline of Aberrant. Its conclusion brings a close to "Phase I" of the Aberrant story, setting events in motion that I presume will come to fruition in future scenario collections. This scenario is also noteworthy in that it includes a pitched battle between the two heavyweight novas of the setting, Caestus Pax and Divis Mal, the outcome of which reveals even more about White Wolf's plans for the setting. I also appreciate that we finally get a sense (however incomplete) of the breadth and depth of Pax and Mal's powers and abilities, something sorely lacking in previous releases.

Aside from some atrocious editing ("roll" for "role" occurs consistently in one chapter), the book's main "flaw" is that it's clearly a Storyteller-only book. While there is some new background material, including new quantum powers, the bulk of the book is made up with the four scenarios. This wasn't really a problem for me, but I can't help wondering whether this fact will hurt sales, thereby endangering further releases in the series.

This would be a great shame, as *Aberrant: Worldwide* is an excellent model for future adventure collections. The scenarios are well written and flexible with lots of advice on how to tailor them to different groups of players. Likewise, the scenarios tie into the metaplot without unduly binding the hands of Storyteller or the players. Likewise, the characters aren't mere spectators; they can and do influence the outcome of world events. This isn't to suggest *Aberrant: Worldwide* is a perfect book. However, it is an excellent first step in the direction of adventure collections that make some attempt to do justice the conflicting interests of game companies (and players) that wish to develop the setting with a metaplot, while also allowing player characters a hand in these events as they unfold. Here's hoping future releases build on the groundwork laid here - to the benefit not only of *Aberrant* but other games looking for a better approach to scenario collections.

-- James David Maliszewski

Pyramid Review

Behind the Veil (for Lightning Strike)

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Wunji Lau

32 pages, $15.95

Behind the Veil is the second release for *Lightning Strike*, the mass combat rules system based on their *Jovian Chronicles* line. The 32-page book details the planet Venus and their military, adds new rules to the basic game, and includes two pages of full color counters. The book consists of four chapters bound in a flashy cardstock cover and containing two pages of counters of similar quality to the cover.

Chapter one begins with two pages of obligatory fiction, climaxing with a further two pages at the end of the book (pages 30-31). The story is interesting, and sets the mood for playing Venusian characters, and marks the return of an infamous Jovian bad guy. Following this intro are a number of small sections detailing the structure of both Venusian society and its military. This section can best be described as a teaser for a *Jovian Chronicles* sourcebook. Like the free sample table at Safeway, it teases you with a brief look at Venusian society, before asking you to move along. I wanted to know more about the people and culture of Venus. In the scant few pages provided, I learned that Venus and the solar system in general believe that the planet is mostly harmless; only the military realize this is not the case. The book is peppered with brilliant ideas and concepts such as: Venusian corporations jockeying to place loyal employees on prestigious ships, all Venusian military ships being disguised as civilian freighters, or their being an exo-armor designated for Executive use only. Chapter three also shines with good ideas.

The second chapter adds a number of rules that can be used to enhance the original rule set, such as stealth grappling and new weapons. Two of these six pages detail specific rules for Venusians, vehicle design philosophy and its effect on campaigns in addition to a couple of modifications to game system specific to Venus players. The stealth and cloak rules add a new level of sophistication to the game, allowing units to operate similar to U-boats in WW2. For a nation, which disguises all its warships as merchant vessels, it only seems natural to have a few stealth ships thrown into the mix. Also included are grappling rules which greatly improve close combat, by giving exo armor more options and increasing the versatility of the smaller exo suits.

Chapter three details various new units, and includes five pages of Data Cards, the balance being devoted to descriptions of each unit. At ten pages, this section makes up the bulk of the book. It is obvious that the writer has put a great deal of thought into the units detailed here, and aside from a few errors it is remarkably tight. (The data card for the Sakura has transposed a couple of Stat headings and the Ryu has no plasma lances, unlike its RPG counterpart.) The vehicles are well thought out and have a uniquely Venusian design philosophy behind them. For instance, the fighters all have one side that they roll over onto for reentry, but use a different alignment when outside of the atmosphere. Much like a flounder, they turn sideways when they breach the atmosphere; one even turns upside down. The capital ships are also interesting, but I can't for the life of be comprehend how the Shan-yu battlecruiser can conceal 6 hanger bays and 6 launch catapults and still pass itself off as a merchant vessel.

The final chapter presents new rules for Drones. I'm not sure why this section wasn't included in chapter two, as drones really are nothing more than an expensive weapons system. It would've made more sense to consolidate chapter two and four into a larger rules-only chapter, especially as there are no new rules presented in this book that specific only to Venusians. *Lightning Strike* goes to great pains to specifically indicate that all of the solar powers have access to the same technology as any of the others. They simply chose for one reason or another not to use exploit it. So

while Venus uses cloaked ships more than any of the other nations, that doesn't exclude the other nations from using cloaked ships. Unlike **Star Trek**, Jovian scientists are more than capable of reverse engineering captured technology. Presumably the reason CEGA and Jupiter don't field many cloaked units is due to their imperialistic agendas; you can't intimidate your enemies' civilian populations if your ships are invisible. It is emphasized in chapter one that the majority of the solar system's people don't think that Venus even has a large military. I like the fact that the basic technologies are available to all player nations, but don't like the idea of buying the Venus book just to get the new rules for drones. Still, I guess if you have to add new rules to a game, you might as well print them in the sourcebook of the nation who uses them the most.

Overall the book it tightly written, very well organized, and has a lot of interesting concepts that scream to be fully fleshed out in a Venus sourcebook for the Jovian Chronicles RPG. However at only 32 pages and crossing into the $15+ boundary, I'm not sure the supplement is cost effective. **Behind the Veil** is a great little book that looks good and tastes even better; like an appetizer, it isn't a full meal and leaves you wanting more. Combining a Venus, Mars and Mercury book into a 90+ page supplement would have been a much better idea and more cost effective to be sure. Regardless, I would recommend the book to die hard **Lightning Strike** fans or gamers who want to field Venusian units. It's a great read, but a short one.

-- Andrew J. Lucas

by Jason P. Prince

Art by [Gold Rush Games](http://www.goldrushg.com)

"There is a saying,
'Katana wa samurai no tamashii' - the sword is the soul of the samurai."
-- Stan Sakai, *Space Usagi Vol III #1* - Inside cover, Dark Horse Comics, 1996

Introduction

Collector of Souls

Collector of Souls is an adventure centered on a fencing school, the Reflection in Blade School, and its sword obsessed sensei, Inokuma Hidetomo. The Heroes get involved in the tale of young Asai Toshishiro, who has come to the school to recover the daisho of his now dead brother. On his own he is bound to become yet another victim to Inokuma Hidetomo's blade, but ingenuity and courage on the part of the Heroes should see justice done.

This adventure could be easily used in any other samurai genre games.

For information on *Usagi Yojimbo* and his creator Stan Sakai the following web sites should be of interest:

- http://www.usagiyojimbo.com/
- http://usagiyojimbo.com/uyo.html
- http://usagiyojimbo.com/sdcc/sdcc99.html
- http://www.goldrushg.com/rpg/uy.html

Historical Note

In the Japanese history of sword making, various sword-smiths have gained reputations for the quality and character of their blades. One smith in particular, Muramasa Senzo (b. 1341), was known to produce blades with an evil reputation of being "bloodthirsty," bringing death to victim and user alike. His blades were believed to induce murder and suicide; apparently the belief stretched to say that once a Muramasa blade had "tasted" blood, the owner had to "feed" it more or he would starve to death.

Details on Muramasa blades from *Japanese Swordsmanship*, by Gordon Warner and Donn F. Draeger, Weatherhill Inc, 1996.

Background

Inokuma Hidetomo was once a respectable fencing master, and his fencing school had a reputation for excellence. He was a hard master, and only the most promising students were able to enter his school. Eight years ago this all changed. A brash young ronin came to the school demanding acceptance. Inokuma Hidetomo almost refused him, but when he noticed the quality of the daisho that the ronin bore he decided to allow him to join. Not long after he had begun his training, the ronin grew angry that he was put to mundane tasks and not learning any of the schools secret techniques. When another student made fun of him, the ronin sought out his swords and forced the other student to duel him. When Inokuma Hidetomo appeared he found the ronin had slain the student. He challenged the ronin and easily defeated him. Latter that night, when the ronin's valuables were brought to him, he took a close look at the daisho to discover that they were a set made by the skilled but infamous Muramasa Senzo (see Historical note above). The quality of the swords was superior to his own, and for months after the incident he found himself drawn to examine the blades, which he now kept in a fine lacquered chest in his room. The following year he took the daisho and had them purified, finally making them his own. The katana bears the name Hornet and the wakizashi is known as Wasp. The daisho handles are colored yellow in black - much like the abdomens of the insects they are named after.

After Inokuma Hidetomo began wearing the blades, the atmosphere in the school changed. His once hard but fair attitude became cruel. In the following years he wounded many students with the Muramasa Senzo blades, whilst practicing iaijutsu (swift draw and attack with a sword) techniques. These cuts he claimed were deliberate and only occurred when students failed to follow his instruction. Presently most senior students have scars to attest to their encounters with the swords.

The Reflection in Blade Ryu has gained local notoriety as sensei Inokuma Hidetomo has become obsessed with collecting blades, especially those of fine quality. Whenever a blade or daisho of worth comes to his notice he arranges for members of his school to test the owner. If they are defeated in the Dojo (meditation/training hall), then he arranges for one or more of the senior students to get the blades, usually by arranging a duel with live weapons. In some cases such sword owners do not come to the school and Hidetomo sends his students out to create a reason to duel. Several students have been killed this way, but their deaths have allowed Hidetomo to assess the strength of the bearer. Hidetomo then decides whether he can defeat them, and if so he personally challenges them. When they have been too strong he has prudently left them alone.

Hidetomo has lined the senior end of the dojo where he sits with all the swords he has "collected." During ceremonies and important duels he has them unsheathed and placed back on their stands. Most samurai would consider exposure of a blade in such a disrespectful way very disturbing. This action of Hidetomo's has sparked several duels in the past with outsiders. Hidetomo claims that the naked blade represents the central focus of his instruction, and to master his style practitioners must learn to be in harmony with their souls. If the presence of others souls -- which the swords lining his dojo are -- disrupt this harmony, then the samurai has already defeated themselves.

The Current Situation

A samurai in service, Asai Toshishiro, has come seeking the Reflection in Blade Ryu to recover his deceased elder brother's diasho. All he knows is that his brother died two weeks ago when he challenged an assistant instructor (kyoshi) Oda Ichiro to a duel over a matter of honor. Asai Toshishiro has been sent by his father to get details on the duel and to recover the diasho, which has been in the family for almost two hundred years. Asai Toshishiro is cautious though, and is trying to uncover information about the ryu from the nearby town of Godin. It is here that he is most likely to encounter the Heroes and intrigue them with what he has heard of the ryu and its sensei.

Current Course of Events

If the Heroes were not to get involved, Asai Toshishiro would eventually travel to the ryu and ask for his brother's personal effects. Sensei Hidetomo would refuse to return the blades and Asai Toshishiro would leave disgraced, having failed his mission. Asai Toshishiro will then loiter a few days in the nearby town coming to grips with what he should do. In his mind, returning empty-handed to his family would shame him irrevocably. Meanwhile, students in town hang around waiting for Asai Toshishiro to leave so they might waylay him and get his daisho for their master. If the Heroes

have ignored events up until now, you could always arrange for them to witness an attack on Asai Toshishiro in town by the students to try and draw them into the story. Anyway, unless convinced of a better plan to regain the swords, Asai Toshishiro will return to the school, where he is very likely to be slain by his brother's killer, sensei Oda Ichiro.

Collector of Souls

Changing Karma

Obviously, this adventure requires the Heroes to help out Asai Toshishiro. For the most part this works best if the Heroes come up with a reasonable solution themselves. Here are a few possible courses of action that the players could follow. These are detailed to help assist and anticipate what might happen, but are not intended in anyway to be the only solutions or limit the flow of story.

To recover Asai Toshishiro's brother's daisho, the Heroes will need to either defeat Hidetomo or steal the blades back. The intention of this adventure is to make the former unlikely to succeed because he is too skilled for the Heroes. The latter is possible but somewhat dishonorable and likely to make the whole school (and authorities) pursue them. Fortunately for the Heroes an old traveling samurai, Tadashi, is passing through town at this time, and his wisdom and skill offer the best chance of success.

Tadashi also provides a good opportunity to help roleplayers unfamiliar with the *Usagi Yojimbo* genre and the importance of a samurai's swords. Advice and insight can be played "in character" using him, rather than dryly explaining the importance of aspects of the culture. So, for example, if you need to detail the nature of a samurai's soul that rests in his blades, then have Tadashi "remind" them of it or tell a tale about his own master training him. Some examples are: (Note these are actually taken from *Usagi Yojimbo Book Two*, By Stan Sakai, published by Fantagraphics Books, 1988)

- "The two swords, the Katana and the Wakizashi are the symbols of the samurai. Indeed they are the soul of the samurai." (page 9)
- "The sword is not just a weapon. . . it's also a mirror. It reflects the soul of the samurai. It is the soul of the samurai. Just as the blade can be tarnished, so can the soul be corroded. Swordsmanship is a discipline and a way of strengthening one's inner self. So keep your soul sharp and clear. Remember. . . A true samurai does not look for a fight. . . but tries to avoid it. The best souls are those which are kept in their scabbards." (page27)

The last quote clearly contrasts with Hidetomo's activities.

Going to the School

If the Heroes accompany Asai Toshishiro on his first visit to the school, they can meet the main protagonists and encounter the test. They will be politely shown the school grounds and at the Dojo they will see the display of daisho lining the walls around the sensei's raised seating position. During this visit Hidetomo will suggest a "friendly" match using bokken (wooden swords) between the Heroes and some members of his school. Hidetomo will be particularly interested in anyone who has a fine daisho or performs well. Match the Heroes in single duels with Experienced students and then with Oda Ichiro. If anyone defeats Oda Ichiro, Hidetomo will congratulate him or her and question them on their style. If challenged, Hidetomo will not accept a fight if he does not feel he can win. He will only fight with real weapons or not at all. At this test, Asai Toshishiro will also fight and lose to Oda Ichiro. Hidetomo will use this failure as reason enough not to give Asai Toshishiro his brother's daisho - which sits behind him bare-bladed on a wall rack.

Catching Hidetomo's Eye

If the Heroes make themselves known to Hidetomo anyway, then they become targets of his sword-collecting scheme.

As such, they will be watched by students from the school. If they leave town they will be ambushed by Oda Ichiro and Experienced Students. If they defeated Oda Ichiro, then Hidetomo will personally involve himself. Since Hidetomo is a very good swordsman this could well be fatal for the Heroes, so this should be avoided if possible.

Dealing with Hidetomo

It is unlikely any of the Heroes can match Hidetomo in a duel. On the other hand, Tadashi could defeat him but is reluctant to fight. Furthermore, Hidetomo is cautious to test his opponent's skill first and will be resistant to entering a duel with someone he has not seen in action. One solution would be to draw Hidetomo out and arrange, through slight of honor in public or the like, a duel. Hidetomo will be forced for honor's sake to fight, and should be defeated.

Some Thoughts on Atmosphere

Although this adventure can go several ways, there are a few scenes that could be arranged to maximize the atmosphere. The foremost is the dojo, where the naked blades gleam in the light. Whatever way the Heroes scheme to get back the daisho, they will have to come here. It is an ideal place to have a fight scene, such as the one suggested above when the Heroes visit the club. It would also make a grand place for an end scene with Hidetomo, where a duel amongst the naked blades could see an ironic end as Hidetomo crashes into a wall of razor swords for a messy end.

Another scene of particular *Usagi* comic flavor would be an attack by students of the school to make up for their disgrace if they are defeated in the test. A few Experienced Students might lead a large number of Novices to take the Heroes on in a surprise attack at where the Heroes are staying.

A further scene to add atmosphere would be a quiet evening conversation with Tadashi. His enormous skill should be conveyed through his manner and presence - and perhaps with a demonstration. Whilst trying to get him onside the Heroes conversation will be used by Tadashi to examine the Heroes morals and the worthiness of their cause. At this point or after he has joined them he can test and impress on them the important elements of what it is to be a samurai.

Reflection in Blade School

Collector of Souls

The Reflection in Blade School is situated a short distance (half a Ri; about 2 kilometers) from the farming and trade town of Godin. Surrounding the school's buildings is a wooden palisade to keep out wildlife and prying eyes. Four Novice students watch the only gate all day and night. An Experienced student routinely checks up on them and wanders around the compound every few hours. The largest building is the Dojo, where all the swords of the vanquished line the walls of one end. During the day and early evening, this area is filled with students practicing under the watchful eye of Hidetomo or Oda Ichiro. During the night, two Experienced students meditate and sleep in the chamber. Hidetomo and Oda Ichiro have rooms attached to this building, and can get to the Dojo very quickly if need be.

The Characters

Inokuma Hidetomo

Inokuma Hidetomo is sensei of the Reflection in Blade School. He is a stern, sullen-looking individual, with clear sharp eyes. He wears black and yellow clothing to match his swords, Hornet and Wasp. Hidetomo is indeed slightly insane. He is completely obsessed in obtaining swords. He spends many hours each day examining and cleaning his collection while his students practice. Hidetomo is also very cunning. He is careful to test his "victims" with his students before personally involving himself. He also does not trust Oda Ichiro, suspecting rightly that Oda Ichiro has ambitions to be head of the school before Hidetomo might naturally retire. Hidetomo is a sneaky swordsman, who

although very skilled likes to rely upon unusual "secret" maneuvers to take his opponents by surprise. He likes to hit his blade (soul) against another in fights deliberately to rattle them. He considers, like many samurai of the age, that taking someone unawares in an attack is legitimate because a good swordsman should always be alert and ready. He likes to hold his blade so that his opponent receives reflected light in their eyes, and an opponent may be unbalanced as Hidetomo uses his blade as mirror to watch his opponent. When the Heroes witness (or participate in) the duel with Hidetomo, they should feel that he is working on another mystical level from the rest of them - obsessed as he is with his swords.

Inokuma Hidetomo
Cat Sensei (Shugyosha)

PHYSICAL	5	**DEF**	10	**HITS**	25
MENTAL	4				
COMBAT	6				
MOVE	5	**RUN**	10	**SPRINT**	15
		SWIM	5	**LEAP**	5

ACROBATICS	6
ARCHERY	4
CLIMBING	5
EVADE	4
JUJUTSU	4
KENJUTSU	8
PERCEPTION	5
PERSUASION	3
POLEARMS	4
RIDING	4
STEALTH	4
THROW	3

Special Abilities:
NINE LIVES (1 life left - his own blades have taken most of them)
SPECIALIZED TACTICS (Forfeit attack and in defense choose strategy after being told opponents)

Oda Ichiro

Oda Ichiro is the assistant instructor (kyoshi) at the school. Oda Ichiro dresses impeccably in green and blue. He knows his master is somewhat crazed, and suspects it is because of the blades. But Oda Ichiro suffers the occasional stings of his master's swords, in return for further training in the secret techniques of his sensei. Oda Ichiro harbors ambitions to take over the school, and for both these reasons he continues to do his duty. He has no qualms about his role that requires him to kill others and take their blades, but he plans to discontinue the practice when he heads the school. Unfortunately, he does envy his master his daisho, and is contemplating taking it when he defeats him. Once he falls under the effects of the blades he may well travel the same path his sensei has. Oda Ichiro likes to use his leap to surprise opponents during fighting.

Oda Ichiro
Rabbit Shugyosha

PHYSICAL	4	DEF	8	HITS	20
MENTAL	4				
COMBAT	6				
MOVE	6	RUN	12	SPRINT	18
		SWIM	6	LEAP	6

CLIMBING	3
EVADE	4
JUJUTSU	4
KENJUTSU	6
PERCEPTION	5
RIDING	2
STEALTH	3
THROW	3
TRACKING	3

Special Abilities:
SPECTACULAR LEAP
SPECIALIZED TACTICS (Forfeit attack and in defense choose strategy after being told opponents)

Novice Students

Novice students dress in worn white hakama (trousers) and Kimono.

PHYSICAL	2	DEF	4	HITS	10
MENTAL	2				
COMBAT	3				
MOVE	3	RUN	6	SPRINT	9
		SWIM	3	LEAP	3

CLIMBING	2
EVADE	2
JUJUTSU	1
KENJUTSU	1
PERCEPTION	2
STEALTH	2
THROW	2
TRACKING	2

Novice Students (various species)

10	10	10
10	10	10
10	10	10
10	10	10
10	10	10

Experienced Students

Dress in worn black hakama (trousers) and white Kimono.

PHYSICAL	3	**DEF**	6	**HITS**	15
MENTAL	3				
COMBAT	4				
MOVE	3	**RUN**	6	**SPRINT**	9
		SWIM	3	**LEAP**	3

CLIMBING	3
EVADE	3
JUJUTSU	2
KENJUTSU	4
PERCEPTION	3
STEALTH	3
THROW	3
TRACKING	2

Experienced Students (various species)

15	15	15
15	15	15
15	15	15

Tadashi

Tadashi is an old wandering ronin, a man at peace with the world in his final years. His finely-crafted but worn clothes attest to a once high rank in a samurai clan. His wrinkled face and gnarled hands indicate he is well beyond typical samurai retirement age. He wears simple unadorned daisho, no mon (clan symbol) and a wicker hat. He is humble and friendly of manner. He is not interested in killing, and will be very reluctant to help the Heroes in any sort of assault. He likes to use words of wisdom, especially Taoist and Zen sayings.

Tadashi
Dog Sensei (Shugyosha)

PHYSICAL	3	**DEF**	6	**HITS**	15
MENTAL	6				
COMBAT	6				
MOVE	3	**RUN**	6	**SPRINT**	9
		SWIM	3	**LEAP**	3

ARTISTRY (HAIKU)	3
CLIMBING	3

ETIQUETTE	3
EVADE	3
JUJUTSU	2
KENJUTSU	9
PERCEPTION	6
STEALTH	3
THROW	3
TRACKING	6

Special Abilities:
TRACKING (Track by scent)
SPECIALIZED TACTICS (Forfeit attack and in defense choose strategy after being told opponents)

Asai Toshishiro

Asai Toshishiro is seeking the return of his brother's daisho. Asai Toshishiro is young, and dressed in bright yellows and purples. He is quite bright and cautious, but he also will not return home empty handed. Asai Toshishiro will find any plan to sneak into steal back his brother's blades dishonorable, and thus want no part of such a plan. Asai Toshishiro is a useful tool to remind Heroes who contemplate various un-samurai activities.

Asai Toshishiro is designed to the equivalent of a beginning character, and a Player could indeed be substituted for him, allowing a much closer connection with these events. As long as he or she can be a Samurai in service, then they do not have to be a retainer. They would have to be cat species if male, of course.

Asai Toshishiro
Cat Retainer

PHYSICAL	4	**DEF**	8	**HITS**	20
MENTAL	4				
COMBAT	4				
MOVE	4	**RUN**	8	**SPRINT**	12
		SWIM	4	**LEAP**	4

ACROBATICS	2
ARCHERY	2
CLIMBING	5
EVADE	3
JUJUTSU	2
KENJUTSU	5
PERCEPTION	2
PERSUASION	2
RIDING	2
STEALTH	4
THROW	3

Special Ability:
NINE LIVES (5 left)
LOYAL INTENSITY (Once per session recover all stun damage)

The Suppressed Transmission Tarot V: The Suit of Saucers

"It is noteworthy that Crowley here notes the connection with the number of cards in the Tarot, Rota, the 'all-embracing Wheel,' which may be highly significant in a UFO context."
-- Kenneth Grant, *Hecate's Fountain*

"One measures a circle," quoth the immortal Charles Fort, "beginning anywhere." And with these circles, these disks, these saucers, we begin this column and end our exploration of [Suppressed Transmission Tarot](#) design. While the fire of [Knives](#) illuminates horror, the [Forks](#) remain embedded in their alternative earths, and the water of magic fills the [Cups](#), the Saucers of conspiracy -- of mystery from without, not secret magic from within -- hang high in the thin, dubious air of theory. (As always, for Tarot theory, I recommend Bill Butler's *Dictionary of the Tarot*, which airs numerous designs and definitions for as many Tarots.) The Saucers, although they derive their meaning and shape (or vice versa) from the conventional Pentacles, must represent the "air suit" of this Tarot. Airy mentalities such as these might better be represented in your games (should you choose to deploy these entities) circumscribed by chalked pentacles than by metallic dishes in the skies. Or, for the traditionalist, perhaps some alchemist worked alien metals into fourteen coins, each of which remains in sympathetic harmony with some ultraterrestrial intellect -- an intellect with its own agenda expressed in the fall of the coins or the pattern of the cards. Look to the skies!

"[W]e believe that the images contained in Contact Cards will speak directly to the subconscious minds of the seeker and the reader. They will therefore assist in revealing the inner-realm dialogues that we believe already may be happening between the subconscious minds within humanity and the corresponding mental levels within extraterrestrial intelligences."
-- Kim Carlsberg and Darryl Anka, *Contact Cards*

[Roswell](#) (**Ace of Saucers**): A silver saucer sticks up from the red New Mexico desert, gleaming against the sky. Around its rim and elsewhere appear odd, quasi-Egyptian hieroglyphs; in the portholes and around the engine vents a faint, green glow luminesces. This disk is the bearer of knowledge, the potential for elevation or for doom. Interpretation: The idea, the central concept, the first premise, valuable knowledge.

[The Tabloid](#) (**Two of Saucers**): Beneath the screaming headline -- ELVIS, JFK TO ADDRESS UN ON UFO CRISIS -- we see a photograph of two flying saucers over the White House. The tabloid shields the reader's face, but we can see the sleeve of his black suit, and his Masonic ring on the fourth finger of his left hand. Interpretation: Written news, change, potential instability.

[The Pyramids](#) (**Three of Saucers**): The Great Pyramids of Gizeh sit in the center of their complex of tombs and temples, where some priestly firelit ceremony takes place; the torches line up to demonstrate the Pythagorean Theorem and a Fibonacci curve. Above each Pyramid hovers a saucer, themselves forming a triangle. Above the saucers, Orion gleams down, the three stars of his belt perfectly aligned with the Pyramids below. Interpretation: Organization, workmanship, know-how.

Area 51 (Four of Saucers): A shadowy recruiting poster for a secret war. Two Men in Black and two U.S. Air Force pilots walk across the tarmac of Area 51; behind them, being refueled with thin hoses and sprayed with green-glowing fluids, sits the U.S. Air Force's proud squadron of four Aurora flying saucers, reverse-engineered with Grey technology to win the Cold War. An American flag flies overhead. Interpretation: The establishment, political power and information.

[Maury Island](#) (**Five of Saucers**): Five saucers hover in midair over a small boat, raining radioactive slag down on the hapless figures. A dog, a boy, and a man are falling from the boat into the water. A low, wooded island is visible in the background, with three dark figures on it. The five brass disks form a pentagram in the blue sky. Interpretation: Loss, lies, chaos, ruin and mischief.

HAARP (Six of Saucers): Six radar disks hang on the forest of antennae above the Alaskan tundra; their focus aims at a spot in the sky above where the aurora borealis glows greenest. As the aurora fluoresces, it almost appears to form an alien face in the sky. Signs on the fence at the base of the antennae read "Warning" and "Look Out" and "Watch The Skies." Interpretation: The present, attention, perception.

The *U.S.S. Eldridge* (Seven of Saucers): The *U.S.S. Eldridge* steams out of the Philadelphia Naval Yard with a large, complex coil mounted on its deck. At the heart of the coil lies a cylindrical pile of seven disks; a naval officer (Robert A. Heinlein?) watches from the dock as green fire begins to flare from the apparatus and spark off the masts. The ship's outline is already "ghosting" to the stern, leaving greenish after-images as it folds itself through the vortex. Interpretation: Anxiety, chance, the odds, indecision, two possible or simultaneous outcomes.

The Reptoids (Eight of Saucers): On one side of the card, under the British royal arms, a Reptoid dressed in royal robes discusses matters with Winston Churchill. On the other side, beneath an eagle-and-swastika, a Reptoid in a black SS uniform points out a detail to Adolf Hitler. Although the discussions manifestly occur in different rooms, both parties look at the same circular radar screen centered on the card, which shows eight saucer-shaped blips. Interpretation: Skill, cunning, intrigue.

Moonbase Tycho (Nine of Saucers): Space-armored figures bound down from a USAF flying saucer in a lunar crater. Eight more saucers fly overhead in formation. Rovers scoot across the landing pad, raising plumes of dust; the Earth hangs above the whole scene. Domes, quonset huts, and radars compose the base we've had on the Moon since the Fifties. Interpretation: Success, confidence.

The Face on Mars (Ten of Saucers): The Face howls up from the Cydonia plain, surrounded by the Pyramids, the City, and the other cyclopean structures erected by the First and Last Men. But Mars is doomed, and the last ten saucer ships lift off from the surface in two X-shaped formations, leaving their enigmatic successor to watch for their inevitable return from the third planet. Interpretation: Logic, inevitability, progress, finality.

Vannevar Bush (Jack of Saucers): Vannevar Bush shakes the cold, three-fingered hand of a Grey somewhere on a desert airfield, where the Grey's saucer has landed in a sea of official and military vehicles. Two more Greys stand behind their fellow, clutching unrecognizable tools, rods and cones of power and wonder. Bush holds an Enigma machine behind his back. Interpretation: A Promethean figure, a meeting, tricks and subterfuges.

Nikola Tesla (Knight of Saucers): Nikola Tesla stands at the base of an enormous, circular Tesla coil, his arms flung into the air in manic glee. In his right hand he brandishes a lightning rod decorated with ankhs and arrows. His feet do not touch the ground; he is levitating. Behind him the Wardenclyffe tower juts into the sky; the arcing green electricity from the Tesla coil drowns out the light of every star in the sky except for Venus. Interpretation: Cleverness, genius, obsession, stubbornness.

Isis (Queen of Saucers): Isis, a beautiful woman with black hair, pointed ears, and dark green skin, stands over a circular diagram on the ground; at her feet sit the priestesses of ancient Egypt. She alters the diagram with an ankh-shaped pointer. Her crescent-moon crown is a full disk, partially in shadow. Interpretation: A dark woman who implements and fosters knowledge, a teacher, one who sets up the establishment that others may learn.

Charles Fort (King of Saucers): Charles Fort sits smiling at his desk, piles of books and memoranda around him. A Coca-Cola bottle rises up from that litter of pens and inkwells and sanders and notepads. Fort, however, is drinking coffee from a china cup; its saucer holds a crop-circle pattern in coffee rings. Outside the window, a steady rain of carp falls. Interpretation: The master, the professor, the keeper of all knowledge.

"Please Sir, Can I Have Some More?"

Let's start with a quick story.

At the beginning of any game, I ask my players, "So, what are you guys focusing on?" After all, nobody can focus all their attention on everything they do all the time. So, I make them choose that One Thing they're practicing. All their XPs go toward that One Thing. All of them. They can't switch their focus until that One Thing goes up in Rank/Level/Ability. If they do, they lose all the XPs they invested. That's called "keeping your focus."

It's a little trick, but it's a good place to start for this month's column.

For those of you who don't keep score in the *Pyramid* Forum, someone suggested I write a column on how a Dirty GM rewards his players. Well, I started that column about seven times, but never got further than a few paragraphs. The problem? I couldn't keep focus. I couldn't keep on one subject without stumbling onto another one. Each was a big enough subject to deal with all on its own, and I've got a word count here (otherwise, I'd go on and on and on. . .), so this week is the beginning of a series.

In this series (I *think* it's going to be a three-parter), we'll take a look at a few assumptions that nearly everyone takes for granted in roleplaying games, and how a Dirty GM turn those assumptions to his own advantage. This month, we begin our series with one of the greatest assumptions in roleplaying, and when I say greatest, I mean Greatest.

I'm talking about Experience Points.

Nearly every game system uses them (including the three I designed), but that's not the point I'm trying to make here. The point is: *Nearly every game system uses them exactly the same way*. This is so prevalent that you don't wonder if a game system uses XPs, you just assume it does. So this month, let's take a look at a few ways to play dirty with rewards.

The First Great Assumption: American Heresy

The first one starts before anyone even rolls a single die or writes a single number on the sheet. It's the thought that All Characters are Created Equal. The assumption that all characters are equal is ridiculous. Is Elric equal with Moonglum? Is Aragorn equal with Gandalf? Is Frodo equal with Aragorn? Now, granted, Fafhrd and the Mouser are pretty equal, but they're the exception rather than the rule.

The fact of the matter is that roleplaying games are supposed to simulate the literature that inspired them. In fantasy literature, wizards are more powerful than anybody else. Only in game fiction is there a sense of "equality" amongst the group, and that's because those groups were built from characters created within a game system that spouted game balance. The Fellowship of the Ring was *not* a group of balanced characters. Nor were the folks running around in Shannara or the characters in the Thomas Covenant sagas.

So, I suggest you try something new the next time people create characters. I suggest you make them do a write-up of their character before they even touch a character sheet. If the players ask you, "How long should it be?" fall back on the old English 101 answer: "Make it as long as it has to be."

Then, as you look through each description, give out character creation points based on those writings. And I don't mean "Just reward the long-winded guys." Here's an example from my very own head.

Like I said in a previous column, I got the chance to play in a *Vampire* game recently. The character concept I started with was the Toreador assassin (killing is his art) from my New Jerusalem stories. Unfortunately, Jack Flash (with the 5 Dexterity, 5 Firearms, 5 Melee and 5 Celerity) wasn't all that interesting to play. There was no *character* in that character.

On the other hand, the character I wound up playing was much more interesting. He was an Assamite who lived eight hundred years ago. Instead of sneaking into castles, he sent a very formal letter saying, "I'm coming to kill you. I'll be there on the 17th. Make whatever preparations you need to make. You'll be dead by dawn." Unfortunately for the Assamites, my little buddy found Buddha and ran away to the mountains to find spiritual peace - for eight hundred years. He's come back recently because he's had a vision: the peace he seeks is in Los Angeles. So he's back, the guy who used to send kind notes, and while he's still a killing machine (5 Dexterity, 5 Melee, 5 Brawling, 5 Celerity), he *chooses* not to use his skills because he's found inner peace (Humanity 9).

Now, let's pretend I'm two different players, each presenting you with the above characters. Both of these characters look identical on the page (although one speaks Old English and the other speaks French), but don't you think one of them deserves a little bonus? They're both killing machines, designed to abuse the combat system beyond comprehension, but there's some *character* in the Assamite. Besides, as a GM, I can screw around with the Assamite. He balances himself out right well. But that Toreador I have to watch out for. I have to come up with super-bad killer NPCs to keep his quick self in line. But the Assamite keeps *himself* in line. All of his conflict is *inside his own head.* In Electric Johnland, the Assamite gets whatever character points he needs to make up his character. The Toreador, on the other hand, gets exactly what the game system allows.

Too Many Hams, Not Enough Pineapple

The real problem with rewarding Experience Points is the uncomfortable feeling that you're rewarding the good roleplayers and punishing the average ones. Joe isn't a great roleplayer, but he's a good one. He shows up every week, plays out his character to the best of his ability, and always brings chips and sodas. Tim, on the other hand, is a natural wit. He always gets a great laugh, always knows exactly what to say, and is always on his toes. He figures out how to fast-talk the guards, knows how to sweet-talk the princess and figures out all your traps in half a heartbeat. Of course, that means Tim always gets that bonus XP at the end of the game and Joe gets left out in the cold.

See the problem here? Joe's not getting the bonus XPs because he's playing to his ability and Tim's getting those bonus points because. . . he's playing to his ability.

All too often, we game masters (and I did say "we") reward the hams while forgetting about everyone else. Old improv rule (that I learned from those Sea Dog folks): you can't have ham without a little pineapple. In other words, it's all fine and good to give rewards to the players who put themselves in the forefront of the party, but don't forget the guys in the back.

"But John," you say. "What kind of reward can we give Joe? After all, Tim's entertaining. He's making the four hour game session interesting. Aren't we supposed to reward players who get into character and make the game fun?"

Yes. Yes, you are. But there's more than one way to reward a player. Even the quiet ones.

For example, Joe's character is a wizard. He doesn't talk much. He spends most of his time in Tim's shadow. However, like we said above, he's always there for the rest of the party. He always shows up on time and always brings chips and soda. He doesn't do funny voices, or get into character like the rest of the party, but he's always there with the right spell, just when the party needs it.

So, reward Joe for what he *is* doing. And don't reward him at the end of the game, reward him *when* he acts. Immediately. (Especially when it's his spell that saves Tim's overconfident hide.) When Joe's choice of spells is innovative or clever, give Joe bonus XPs to his spellcasting *right then and there*. Show him that you're paying attention and you know that what he's doing isn't as flashy as Tim, but it's just as necessary. A little of this kind of help goes a long way.

Rewards by Proxy

Here's another little Experience Point trick. Tell each of your players they have one Bonus XP they get to award to

someone else tonight. Only one. When someone else does something super duper fantastic, they can reward that player with their Bonus XP.

Rewards Without Experience Points

Even the term is misleading. "Experience Points." I've never liked the fact that XPs can increase your Contacts, Friends, Allies or other Social Bonuses your character has. Experience Points should improve what's inside you. Maybe Experience Points are more like Insight Points. Maybe there's another kind of XP that helps you develop your Contacts, Friends, Allies and other Social Bonuses, eh?

Or maybe we should think outside the box for a second and figure a way to reward players *without* using points.

We all know there are a lot of different breeds of gamers. Some like social characters, others like combat characters, still others like introspective loner characters. Each deserves his own unique brand of reward. In other words, drop the whole generic "XP" thing and figure out a way to reward each individual character with something that will *really* make his eyes shine.

Had me a player who loved his Duelist character back when I was running *AD&D*. Now this guy was the *luckiest* fella you could ever meet. Always rolled 20's on this little jewel red d20. Thing was beautiful. Had a bubble in it. The character he played was an elven swordswoman who was cocky to the extreme. We didn't have the Overconfident Disadvantage back then, or she would have had it. This little Duelist was his favorite character. "Lady Luck," he used to call her. And so, when the time came to reward Lady Luck, I reached into that GM back of tricks and pulled out two things.

The first was a beautiful red ruby - with a flaw in its heart. It was a Luckstone. Added one to every roll she ever made. The second was a sword - a Sword of Sharpness. I think you know the language I'm talkin' here.

Another fella in the game played a Dwarf Berserker. The problem with this little guy is that he was under a curse: he couldn't talk. If he muttered even a single word, he'd go nuts and kill everything in the place. Once again, I reached into that GM bag and pulled out. . . a Dwarven Hammer. You know, the kind that comes back to you when you throw it and kills giants with a single blow? The only problem was the hammer's magical properties would *only* work. . . when its name was spoken.

(Come to think of it, I can't remember if this was *my* **D&D** game or someone's that I played in. Memory can be a tricky thing sometimes, eh?)

Social players (the lovers, not the fighters) are even easier to reward. Every lovely lady they charm, every warlord they impress, every prince they poetically pontificate (sorry, got carried away) is a magic item onto themselves.

The lady can use her own beguiling beauty to win the character favor in court, thus getting him into the best parties, shaking hands with the *real* movers and shakers. You know the rule: "It's not what you know, it's who you know." But then again, making friends in high places isn't the only way to reward a player.

A bard in one of my **D&D** games stopped in the street to tell a group of children a story. He wanted the XPs (he needed ten to hit the next level), and I told him, "Tell a story and you've got it." It was a great story, and I gave him the XPs he needed.

A little later, that glib tongue of his got himself (and the rest of the party) into trouble with a band of nastiness in a local tavern. The party was outnumbered three to one, and the fellows had black poison dripping from their twisty blades. But then, a dark cadre of men stood up in the corner of the room and pummeled those ruffians into a bloody mess. When the fighting was done, one of the shadowy fellows walked up to the bard and said, "I heard that story you told the children this morning. Brought a tear t'me eye, it did." Then, the ruffians walked away.

That same band of ruffians turned out to be the best allies the party ever made. They were the Thieves' Guild.

No Work, No Roll

Every GM rewards his players for good roleplaying in one way or another. Some GMs say, "If you roleplay it, I won't make you roll it." Others say, "If you roleplay it, I'll give you a bonus to your roll."

Check this one out. (By the way, a future game system may well include this trick. It was *my* trick, so I'm using it here, but if you recognize it, remember where you saw it first. Besides, the folks I gave it to are cool, so they'll give me proper credit for it. I hope.)

I recently had a discussion with a few friends about a religious RPG they're developing. They asked me for advice. I took a look at the system and was very impressed. But something was missing. I just couldn't figure it out. After a few hours of pizza and sodas and character creation, it came to me.

They were using Faith.

Now, in my book, Faith sums up to "Believing in something you can't prove." If you're gonna have Faith in an RPG (something I'm figuring out in *Orkworld* right now), you can't call it "faith." There's a mechanic for it. Players can see it. Players can *prove* it. That ain't Faith. That's Devotion.

And with that thought, another came to me. The game system should really use *two* sets of dice: d10s and d6s. If the characters were serving their god, they got to use d10s. If they were serving their own worldly interests, they only got to use d6s. Problem is, the Target Numbers don't change. Heh, heh, heh.

(Of course, now that I think of it, we could always throw in the "Sinful Rule": serve the Enemy, you use d4s.)

That's one for all you clerics out there. Hope you get to see it soon.

Last Trick

Back to the *Vampire* game. When my players got Blood Points, they got them in the form of Hershey's Kisses. You know, the kind wrapped up in red?

When Viscicitude came to town (a nasty vamp disease for those who don't know), I started giving out the ones with the crunchy middle. By the time they bit down, it was already too late.

End of Part One

Experience Points are all well and good, but they aren't the only way to reward your players. The *best* way is to look at the character sheet and find a reward that fits. A reward that *complements* the character in some way.

Don't let the assumptions get you in a rut. Find new ways of handling everything. See you next month when we tackle another Great Assumption. Maybe something small next time; something like Wounds. Or maybe Game Balance. Yeah. Game Balance. That should shake a few nests. . .

We're Reading Your Mail

This week I'm dipping into my mailbag to talk about some random thoughts, and comment on your comments to me.

One of the more commonly asked questions, in my mailbox and over in the newsgroups, is: "Why do you make reference to having only so much space for articles/features/reviews? Since hard disk space is so cheap, why can't you make each issue as big as you'd like, and include everything?" (Variations on this include, "Why can't you publish articles larger than 5,000 words? Why couldn't you run a 50,000 word article if you were so inclined?")

I've answered this in the newsgroups, but I understand not everyone checks those out regularly. The short answer is: because we're a professional magazine.

We're a professional magazine, so unlike many fan sites, we *pay* for our articles. And while the limitation of having only 64 pages (for example) doesn't apply, the fact that we pay, and thus have a budget, does. So while a 5,000 word article gets the author a check for $150, we would need to pay $1,500 for our hypothetical 50,000 word article. . . which is a bit outside our budget (and would get me drawn and quartered by the Powers That Be).

There is another answer, too. . . I would need to edit those behemoths. A 50,000 article is about the equivalent of 200 pages, which is a bit much to edit effectively for a weekly magazine. And the Slushpile is a challenge enough to keep up with when there's a quasi-ceiling of 5,000 words; I shudder to think what would happen if I received a few 50,000 word articles into the mix (or even 10,000 word articles).

So when I say, "We only have room for so many articles," it's because I'm extending the magazine metaphor to the internet; although we don't have an obvious "Wow! There's words on every page so I guess the magazine is full!" boundary, there are nonetheless limits.

Anyway, our first letter comes to us from CatSkinner. He writes:

". . . I've shown your "WHAT WAS I THINKING?" idea to the other GMs around here at work (lots of gamers in the software industry), and now all of them want to do your vowel trick to THEIR players, despite it being a blatantly bad idea. What is it about GMs that we want incredibly difficult puzzles? Who but GMs clips every little maze and riddle they find in the paper, or on the back of cereal boxes?"

At the risk of sounding like a bad 1950's Sci-Fi flick, "Why? Why don't they learn? WHY DON'T THEY LEARN?!?"

I think the reason some GMs (such as myself) like these incredibly difficult puzzles is because, when they work, they can be *so* satisfying. *Raiders of the Lost Ark* had the sequence where Indy puts the medallion on the staff and reflects the light, *Indiana Jones & The Last Crusade* had the scene with the tiles, and *Fifth Element* (a movie that seems directly translated from an RPG adventure if ever there was one) had the end scene with the elements.

The trouble I have with GMing (or playing) is that I don't find it particularly satisfying to resolve the action through combat; any trained chimp can happen to roll the crucial Critical Hit necessary to kill the Real Bad Person. But when the player figures out the Cosmic Conundrum and saves the world, or talks the Kahn out of invading the kingdom through roleplaying, that's something only the player could do. The player has earned that victory. I might talk about this more in the next week or two.

Unfortunately, whenever you present your problem in a way that only the player (not the character) can solve, you run a real risk of them not succeeding. And when it's as lame a puzzle as the vowel trick, you've increased that risk exponentially.

(Oh, and I was a riddle-keeper as a child, though my interest in cereal boxes typically ended upon refueling.)

Okay; next letter.

Upon reading that I'm a migraine sufferer, Ann Dupuis of Grey Ghost, Inc. (makers of the **FUDGE RPG**) sent me a fine e-mail detailing her advice for migraine sufferers. There was plenty of good advice therein (including drink lots of water, exercise, avoid triggers like cigarette smoke, and IMMEDIATELY eat two pieces of bread and a big glass of water at the first sign of a migraine). I've analyzed this advice, internalized it, and come up with my own suggestions for how to deal with migraines:

1. Become Editor of a major gaming magazine.
2. Complain in your forum about migraines.
3. Wait for Ann Dupuis to write you.
4. Follow her advise.
5. Take Excedrin Migraine.

But seriously, thank you, Ann. And in the realm of real advice to you, gentle reader, I'd advise checking out the **FUDGE RPG** if you haven't already. I ran a very successful mini-series using it, and definitely avoided many of the headaches associated with some other systems.

My penultimate letter comes from Andre, who writes to us from Brazil. He writes:

"Dear Steven,

You are crazy.

But Kenneth Hite is faaaaaaaaaaaaaar crazier than you. . .

Your humble servant,

    Andre"

Hmm. . . although I have often questioned my own sanity, I have not delved into the realm of comparative craze study. And that leads to some interesting questions. How crazy am I compared to, say, your average IRS agent? Your typical bungie jumper? Your standard Depeche Mode fan? Is craziness measured additively (like IQ, weight, or standard RPG attribute), or subtractively (like the Mohs mineral hardness scale, or **Call of Cthulhu**'s Sanity)? Has Kenneth been exposed to more Things Man Was Not Meant To Know than I? What would happen if, by diabolical scheme or transporter accident, we were to switch columns? Would man survive?

Finger food for thought.

And finally, our last letter comes from a user who didn't give a name:

"dfruyrtuytiuy]gyltuygtyurtyurfighfkjhgjfytfghyjfyjftyftuytuytuyrrtjfuytjyftjyfutygtyujghjfassssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssssss"

I would just like to comment that I'm glad we're finally succeeding in increasing our cat readership; although other magazines may target those who like cats, we're proud to cater to the cat directly. I'm guessing that the animated Dork Tower, from the April Fool's Issue, was what interested this reader enough to comment/attack the keyboard. Regardless, our kitten-y commitment continues; check out the "String! String! Get the String! Get the String!" article, coming soon.

Well, that wraps up this column. As ever, feel free to write me with your thoughts or comments.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **GURPS Atomic Horror**, p. 6.

(four stars) FILL SQUARE WITH SLIME: Fills an entire square with a cube of lime-flavored gel. Anyone pushing their way through ends their turn upon entering and may not leave until the next turn.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

$?$

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

$?$

Murphy's Rules

$?$

Pyramid Review

Cannon Companion

Published by FASA Corporation

Written by Robert Boyle, Dan "Flake" Grendel, Michael Mulvihil and others

126 Pages, $20.00

Guns!

That will be the first thought to creep into your mind on seeing the subtly titled *Cannon Companion* resting on your game store's shelf. At least, it should be if you're the typical *Shadowrun* player. You might expect a third-edition reprise of the *Street Samurai Catalog*, hopefully tossing in the various new goodies collected over the years. And you might be sort of right, too.

The *Cannon Companion* is an "everything fighty" book for *Shadowrun*, third edition. Yes, it has guns -- the first third of the book covers everything from handguns to SAMs, with a substantial nod toward other ways to kill people, too. There's another thirty pages of armor and potentially useful knickknacks before you hit a gun design system, advanced melee combat and a slew of additional combat rules. Just like *Man and Machine: Cyberware* (reviewed in Pyramid, 1/17/00), this book dispenses with the full-page, single-item layouts and witty flavor text of prior works. Instead, it's text and tables, illustrated nicely but unobtrusively by the new cadre of *Shadowrun* artists.

The weapons are a mix of revision, collection and new ideas. Expect to see mostly familiar arms from the *Street Samurai Guide*, *Neoanarchist's Guide to Real Life*, *Fields of Fire* and possibly a few other sources. For the uninitiated, what this means is a variety of weapon options above and beyond those listed in the basic book. Be warned though: just as in real life, not all of them are worth their list cost. In addition to firearms of all breeds, the *Companion* includes bows, crossbows, a wide range of melee weapons, flamethrowers, machine guns and more. There are also helpful accessories and a number of new ammunition types. Nothing from the core rules is repeated in the main text, so you aren't wasting cash on a reprise of what APDS rounds do or what a katana is. *Every* weapon in third edition so far is included in the handy summary tables at the end, however.

The real treat of the weapons section is the improvised weapon tables. There are two, one for melee, the other for projectile weapons. They serve as helpful and entertaining guides to the effects of a number of objects a desperate Shadowrunner might use to club his enemy into submission. Bottles, pipes, rifle butts and bodies (!) are all statted out and ready to use. Just see if your players can resist the chance to toss cue balls, baseballs, bowling balls and bricks at their enemies.

The stuff in the Armor and Gear and Applied Simsense sections can best be described as complications and toys. If you need to make the runners lives more complex, the armor section is a good start. Walking away from the generic "armor jacket," it introduces a range of designer and run-of-the-mill armored clothing, helpfully pointing out that one can hardly wear a tres chic armored suit while slumming it in the gutters of Seattle. All of this serves to further diminish the PCs available funds as they shell out for the right clothing for each occasion. For the less subtle, there are also military armors, of course. For those more far-out runs, there's the Battletac system, parachutes and a bevy of underwater equipment choices. Gearheads will really love the new options available for skillsofts, while sadistic GMs may appreciate expanded BTL chip rules, assuming any of their players are that dumb.

Gearheads can spring into full...well, gear...with the new firearm design rules. Starting from a basic frame, you can add various options to the limits of your weapon's capacity and a few other constraints, then get a final product, priced and ready to go. The actual design process is fairly simple, but should still let you play around for a while trying to develop your weapon of choice. Options cover ammunition, weapon power, rate of fire, recoil compensation and more. If that isn't enough, there are also rules for modifications to existing weapons. Here you can get your gun engraved, fitted for a biometric safety (so only you can fire it), have the safety removed or even build another weapon onto it. Gearhead heaven.

The new melee combat and martial arts rules are a bit hit and miss. The generic options are fun enough, allowing charges, disarming and so forth. The martial arts rules are a sort of hybrid of *Shadowrun*'s totem rules and a familiar approach from other games. Instead of Unarmed Combat, a character buys a martial art. This yields bonuses and minuses in certain combat situations, much as Totems yield balancing magical modifiers. In addition, martial artists are required to buy Maneuvers, an approach taken in *GURPS Martial Arts*, *World of Darkness: Combat* and several other roleplaying books. It's just as problematic here, unfortunately. The rules add somewhat to *Shadowrun* combat, but probably aren't worth the effort. In addition, the authors seem to be reading Draeger or an even less useful resource, as the listed arts are less-than-inclusive and sometimes mischaracterized (e.g. Hapkido is *not* Taekwondo). On the upside, there's some advice on designing your own art. This is only advice though, and not a rules framework.

The book is capped by nearly twenty pages of additional combat rules. Ambidexterity, cover, smoke -- it's all there. Most of the rules are pretty darn useful, especially things like suppressive fire and armor degradation, which will come up all the time in a typical Shadowrun game. Some of them are more specific, like throwing back grenades and parachuting. For cinematic games, one can master athletic dodging or develop a signature weapon. Continuing the odd emphasis on underwater operations seen in the Gear section, five full pages are devoted to mucking about beneath the surface. For the rules-minded, it's nice to have all these new ones in one book, rather than spread out in different adventures and supplements all over the place.

As mentioned, guns and equipment are summarized in the end of the book -- the last twelve pages, in fact. Guns and gear from this book and the core rules are listed with prices, availabilities and summarized stats. This is, as Ms. Stewart would say, a good thing. Add in the tables from *Man and Machine* and you're all set.

Continuing their pattern of packing everything into a twenty-buck book, the FASA folks have created another good buy. *Cannon Companion* is shorter than the last two major compilation sourcebooks released for third edition, but this is largely a function of more limited material. Even so, it's an affordable update with bonuses, if you're an old player. If you're new, and combat really appeals to you, pick it up as well. While it definitely lacks the reading entertainment value of the old Catalog and other books, it's nice to have fifty-seven new guns, an assortment of other goodies and a plethora of rules all in the one book.

So put on your long coat (the London Fog Line, p. 46), grab a pair of gats (Browning Ultra-Powers, p. 18) and go John Woo (Ambidexterity, pp. 94-95) on some poor scrub.

-- Alexander Shearer

Uncle Al's 2050 Catalog Supplement

Road Safety has always been the name of the game here at Uncle Al's Auto Stop and Gunnery Shop, so it gives us a warm glow to see the military-industrial complex's R&D boys busy devising new "non-lethal" and "less lethal" weapons. And now that some of them have been declassified and available as military or police surplus, you can buy them from Al to enhance your driving pleasure!

Items marked (x) cannot be used in AADA-sanctioned tournaments. Items marked (:) are military equipment; their use is prohibited by the AADA, and their possession or acquisition may be punishable by law.

WEAPONS

Blinding Lasers

Note: Laser weapons that are designed to intentionally blind opponents with unenhanced vision are prohibited by international law AND from AADA sanctioned events. All Uncle Al's lasers are certified 'eye-safe'! If you've mistakenly been issued a communications or targeting laser with the capacity to blind, Uncle Al will happily exchange it on production of a valid receipt.

(x) Blinding laser (BL) - To hit 3, no damage, drains 0 power units when fired. Any TL, MTL or Communications Laser can be modified from 'eye-safe' to blinding frequencies for an extra 10% to cost; no extra space or weight. Blinding lasers are only effective against opponents using Telescopic Optics, Binoculars, Telescopic Sights and Hi-Res Telescopic Sights, who will be temporarily blinded (at least in one eye). Cameras, Computer Gunners and Teleguided Missiles can also be blinded. On a 1, the opponent (or camera) is blinded for 1d seconds; on a 2-3, for 1d minutes; on a 4-5, for 1d hours; on a 6, blinding is lasting and must be surgically corrected.

While prohibited by the AADA because of their effect on cameras and binocular-equipped spectators, blinding lasers are popular with some military and police units as an anti-sniper measure.

Drag Chute Harpoon

If you want to make rabbit stew, you've got to catch your rabbit -- so police forces came up with a way of slowing down vehicles with a minimum of damage! This rocket-powered harpoon fastens a small drag chute to your target's tail; the faster he's going, the more it cramps his style. **Uncle Al does not recommend this weapon for use against aircraft with high stall speeds!**

(x) Drag Chute Harpoon (DCH) - To hit 9, $400 ($550 for flameproof model), 40 lbs, 1 space, 2 DP; 1 point damage, 1-shot weapon. Slows vehicles moving at above 150 mph by 60 mph/turn; vehicles moving at 100 to 150 mph by 40 mph/turn; vehicles moving at 40 to 100 mph by 20 mph/turn until speed is reduced to 40 mph. Adds D4 to any hazard or maneuver. Treat as a Drag Chute in other regards, except that it can't be re-used. Volatile weapon.

Radio-Controlled Drop-Spike Plate

Another popular method of slowing down high-speed chases: DSPs and LDSPs that retract their spikes, allowing other traffic to pass over them unharmed, until you see the target vehicle approaching and press a button and -- **ouch**!

Radio-controlled Drop-Spike Plate (RDSP or RLDSP) -- $400 ($700 for large size). Same weight, etc., as regular DSP or LDSP, but spikes may be retracted or extended as required by remote control. When spikes are retracted, treat as a

Fake plate; when extended, does damage to tires as a regular plate.

Stickyfoam Dispensers

When Uncle Al saw the Lepage Glue Gun demonstrated a few years ago, he predicted that it'd change the face of autoduelling, and he's sticking to that prediction! It looks like regular foam when you lay it down, but sticks to tires (or boots) and roads like ultraglue!

Stickyfoam Sprayer (SfS) - $750, 25 lbs, 2 spaces, 3 DP; 25 shots ($30 and 2 lbs each). Loaded cost $1,500, loaded weight 75 lbs.; loaded magazine costs $800 and weighs 65 lbs. The sprayer mixes two binary chemicals to produce an instant 1" x 1/2" patch of stickyfoam. Any hazard suffered or maneuver performed on stickyfoam adds D4 to the difficulty; stickyfoam also does 1 point of damage to each tire and slows the vehicle down by 5 mph per 1/2" of stickyfoam crossed. Stickyfoam does not burn or melt, but its effects can be negated by Sand Ammo, Stickyfoam Neutraliser, or Superacid. Pedestrians entering a square with stickyfoam will be stuck fast until the foam biodegrades or is neutralised.

Stickyfoam Discharger (SfD) -- $75.

AMMUNITION

Biodegradable Munitions

Ever worry about what happens to that oil slick you left on the interstate? The delay-fuse bomb that didn't explode? The box of anti-personnel napalm mines you could've sworn you'd put away safely on the shelf in your garage? Now, with GreenWarTM biodegradable munitions, you can stop worrying, and take your lawyer off retainer!

Biodegradable Munitions -- Adds 20% to cost, reduces damage of unexploded munitions by 1 point for every 1d every week after use, eventually rendering munitions harmless. Biodegradable oil slicks and stickyfoam, +20% to cost, contain genetically engineered microorganisms which begin reproducing when exposed to air, eating away dropped liquid in 4d hours.

Slug Throwers

Silver Shroud Ammunition

Ever want to gift-wrap a car, or even a tank -- while it's on the road? Then Uncle Al has just what you need!

(x) Silver Shroud Ammunition -- Loaded in GLs, RRs, HRRs, ATGs, RFTGs and TGs. To hit 9; CPS $300, WPS same. Wraps any vehicle of up to 40 spaces in an adhesive aluminium polymer film, totally obscuring vision (-10 visibility penalty), creating a D2 hazard, and preventing turrets, cupolas, sponsons, etc, from rotating. Most weapons can be fired through film; weapons with a fire modifier may set the film alight, burning it away in 2 turns and doing 2 points of damage to the armor on each side. Body blades or cycle blades will reduce a film to tatters in 1d+1 turns.

Grenades

Chemical Laser Grenade

Want a laser, but thought you couldn't afford one? Guess again! With 40mm Battlefield Optical Munitions, you can turn your Grenade Launcher into a pulsed laser weapon and really light up somebody's life! **Warning** -- emits toxic vapor. Uncle Al recommends wearing body armor and a gas mask if firing laser grenades from hand-held launchers.

Chemical Laser Grenades -- To Hit 7, CPS $200, 4 lbs per grenade; 1d+1 damage. Must be fired from GL or URGL; can NOT be thrown. No area effect, and cannot guide laser-guided munitions. Grenade (dye rod, explosive, gas and reflectors) is vaporised on firing; on a 1-2, vapor is blown back at firer, doing 2 points of damage (1 point if wearing a gas mask).

Det-Cord Net Grenade

Just the thing for that fishing trip you've been planning -- an 8' diameter net, laced with explosive cord, packed into a 40mm grenade casing! Good for point defense, clearing minefields, or use against boats. Also available in non-explosive anti-personnel and dolphin-friendly biodegradable versions. (Sorry, no TDX. Maybe next year.)

Det-Cord Net Grenade - $200; with impact fuse, +$50. Clears a 1/2" square of mines, spikes, or ice; ignites dropped oil; triggers any pressure capsules (see below). Can be used to intercept incoming missiles, at half the normal penalty to hit (-3 from target vehicle, -5 from everyone else). Used as a concussion grenade against pedestrians and exposed cyclists, burst radius is reduced to 1/2".

Non-explosive Net Grenade -- $100. Pedestrians, swimmers and exposed cyclists hit by non-explosive net grenades take 1d-5 damage. Pedestrians or swimmers must then roll a 7 or more on 2 dice to remain standing/swimming, and an 11 or more to escape from the net, use a weapon, or move at any speed faster than a crawl. Being hit by a non-explosive net creates a D2 hazard for exposed cyclists. A knife, bowie knife or bayonet adds +2 to any attempt to escape from a net.

Both Explosive Cord and Non-explosive nets float on water, and can foul a mini to medium propeller or equivalent jet drive. A boat crossing a net counter will become fouled on a roll of 1-2, causing that propeller/drive to stop after 1d+1 turns. Biodegradable nets, +20% to cost, dissolve after 2d hours in water.

High Explosive Squash Head (HESH) Grenades

$90 (includes impact trigger; +$20 for AGL grenades). For GL, AGL or URGL; cannot be thrown. 2d damage, 0" burst radius; acts like HESH Warhead.

Dropped Solids

Catalytic Spike

Catalytic depolymerization is a great way of getting rid of unsightly old tires with a small amount of chemicals -- especially now, when you can do it while those tires are still on your opponent's car! A special surprise from the dirty tricks boys at R&D!

Catalytic Spikes -- $60 and 5 lbs each. Look just like regular spikes and are loaded in a regular spikedropper. A loaded magazine costs $650 and weighs 65 lbs. Does 1d damage to tires, no damage to solids, like regular spikes - but injects a chemical that continues to dissolve the rubber, doing 1 point of damage every second turn, even to solid tires, until the tire disintegrates completely. Plasticore tires will take 4 points of damage before being reduced to bare plastic; damage will then stop.

Crystal Spike

No see 'em, no avoid 'em!

Crystal Spikes -- $30 and 4 lbs each. Do damage just like regular spikes and are loaded in a regular spikedropper. A loaded magazine costs $350 and weighs 45 lbs. Made of transparent plastic, Crystal Spikes can be seen on a roll of 1 at 6" distance, on a 1-2 at 5", on a 1-3 at 4", and so on; Visibility Targeting Modifiers apply. Not available in Catalytic, Explosive or Incendiary versions.

Programmable Mines

Want smarter mines to cut down on those embarrassing friendly fire incidents? Want to deny an area to trucks or tanks without toasting your biker buddies? Well, these babies can be pre-programmed to ignore any vehicle below a certain weight, from 50 lbs to 50 tons.

Programmable Mines -- all mines except Spider Mines can be made programmable at 2x normal cost. The weight must be programmed before the mines are loaded. Programmable mines can be mixed with other mine loads in a magazine. Cannot be Radio Detonated or use Proximity Fuses.

Other Dropped Weapons

Pyrophoric Oil

Looks just like a regular oil slick -- but when someone drives onto it, it ignites! Come on baby, light my fire! Available in anti-personnel and anti-vehicle versions.

Pyrophoric Oil -- Any standard oil jet or discharger can drop Pyrophoric Oil. CPS 5x normal, WPS normal. Pyrophoric oil won't burst into flame until the pressure-sensitive microbeads inside are crushed, causing a chemical reaction (50 lbs to trigger anti-personnel version, 300 lbs to trigger anti-vehicle version) that ignites the slick. Damage and other effects as a Flaming Oil Jet. Volatile weapon.

Superacid Cloud

A corrosive gas custom-engineered to military specifications, Superacid has been prohibited by the AADA.

(:) Superacid Cloud -- Loaded in TXGs and HDTXGs, cost and weight same. As with toxin gas, binary chemicals are combined and form a cloud that disperses after 5 turns. This cloud looks like a paint cloud and blocks fire in the same way, but does 1d damage to pedestrians and exposed cyclists that touch or pass through the cloud. A superacid cloud will also etch car windows and camera lenses, permanently giving a -2 visibility penalty, and corrode air filters, opening the vehicle to other forms of gas attack. If a vehicle spends two or more phases exposed to a superacid cloud, the acid will destroy items with less than 1 DP fitted outside the vehicle's armor (such as Dischargers, Laser-reactive webs, Camouflage netting, and Laser Communications Targets); each tire inside the cloud will also take 1/2d of damage. A second exposure to a superacid cloud will do 1/2d of damage to the driver, gunner, any passenger, and every unarmored internal or external component, as well as a further 1/2d to the tires.

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DEFENSE

Birdcatcher

Incoming! Ahh, don't worry about it. BirdcatcherTM automatic point-defense software for the ATAD or Computer Gunner will swat those pesky missiles, leaving you free to keep your eyes on the road and your finger on the trigger!

(x) Birdcatcher -- $1000, no weight or space. Destroyed when the Power Plant is destroyed. Uses existing sensors to detect and target any incoming missiles. Must be linked to a turret weapon or group of weapons to provide line of fire on every side ($50 per link). Can also be linked to chaff or hot smoke dispensers, bollixes, radar jammers, etc., but cannot distinguish between missile types.

Stickyfoam Neutraliser

Another triumph of catalytic depolymerization technology: safe for tires, but unsticks stickyfoam. Also makes a great paint stripper!

Stickyfoam Neutraliser -- Loaded in any paint-using weapon, CPS 5x normal, weight same. Like paint, it forms a cloud that lasts for 1 turn. Sprayed on an area of stickyfoam, it turns it into a harmless liquid; sprayed on anything hit with defensive or glow-in-the-dark paint, it dissolves the paint in one turn.

ACCESSORIES

Airbag Restraints

Want to restrain unruly prisoners? Want to stop that fare turning into a carjacker? Or just keep the kids from asking "Are we there yet?" for the rest of the trip? Inflate these toughened police-issue airbags, and enjoy the peace!

Airbag restraints -- $200 and 10 lbs each, no space. Fitted to passenger seats, can be inflated to prevent passengers from moving, talking, or taking actions. Reusable unless damaged; firing action to inflate or deflate. Deflating takes 2 turns; can be deflated by most weapons that can damage tires (1 DP), but all attacks while restrained are at -10. While airbag is inflated, passenger also receives protection from collision and roll damage; reduce damage by 1/4 (round up).

Voice Controls

Got your hands full? No problemo! With this software for your vehicular computer, and a few inexpensive peripherals, you CAN do two things at once!

Voice Controls -- Software for Autopilot or Vehicular Computer. $200, no weight or space, 0 DP; destroyed when the computer is destroyed. Gives driver, gunner OR passenger (responds to one voice only) voice control over up to 10 accessories with simple commands ('on' or 'off', for devices such as Bollixes; 'up' or 'down' for pop-up turrets; 'blow' for ejection seats or airbag restraints), enabling the user to perform two firing actions simultaneously. Starshell Launchers, Dropped Weapons and Dischargers can also be linked to Voice Control at $50 per link. Cannot be used for weapons that need to be aimed, or to drive car (though it can be used to activate Autopilot).

PERSONAL WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT

Portable Stickyfoam Sprayer

Don't get stuck without one of these! $1000 buys you both tanks, the sprayer, and enough foam to cover 500 square

feet.

Portable Stickyfoam Sprayer (PSfS)-- To hit 6, $700, 5 GE, 2 DP, 10 shots, CPS $30. When carried as cargo it takes up 1 space, and weighs 70 lbs. loaded and 50 lbs empty. When fired, the PSfS creates a standard stickyfoam patch 1" by 1/2". A pedestrian carrying a PSfS moves only half as fast as other pedestrians. Should the wearer be hit, roll 1d; on a 1-2, the PSfS is hit. One point of damage ruptures one of the binary chemical tanks, making the PSfS useless; two or more ruptures both, creating a 1" square patch of stickyfoam with the wearer stuck in the centre.

Bibliography:

Colonel John B. Alexander, *Future War: Non-Lethal Weapons in Twenty-First-Century Warfare*.

Craig Sheeley, *Uncle Al's Catalog From Hell*.

by Les Simpson

Patrick Kapera, the Lead Story Writer for the popular *Doomtown CCG*, is still recovering from the conclusion of their first major story arc, and already he's hard at work bringing the new storyline together. He took a few moments from his busy schedule to chat with *Pyramid*.

* * *

Pyramid: Well, Patrick, you certainly have worn a lot of hats at AEG: Staff Writer, Director of Marketing, and now the Lead Story Writer for the **Doomtown Collectible Card Game***. How did you get into the gaming industry and what are some of your more notable credits?*

Patrick Kapera: Amazingly enough, I fell into the gaming industry by accident. A friend of mine at AEG (and our current art director), Jim Pinto, recommended me at a local convention in Los Angeles. I'd known Jim for several years at that point as a fellow convention goer, avid live-action/tabletop gamer, and all-around great guy. Within a couple weeks, I was interning at the AEG offices under DJ Trindle. My duties mainly focused on editing to begin with (*Way of the Crane* and *Way of the Scorpion*, among others), but I was drawn to the creative end of the company rather quickly. In short order, I was generating material for *Legend of the Five Rings* products (*Way of the Scorpion* first, then every *Way of. . .* book since).

Four months later, I came on board as a full-time employee of the company. Since then, I've worked in every department -- writing, editing, advertising, marketing. . .

I've written the *Way of the Phoeni*x and the *Way of the Lion* with Ree Soesbee, and chunks of the *7th Sea RPG*, and the *Clan War* miniatures wargame -- along with a host of smaller works too numerous to remember (er, mention). My full-credits include *Legacy of the Forge*, the *Legend of the Burning Sands CCG*, and the upcoming second story-arc for the *Doomtown CCG*.

Pyramid: That brings us to the **Doomtown** *property. The game is based on the* **Deadlands RPG** *by Pinnacle and has now moved from being produced by* **Wizards of the Coast** *to being produced by AEG. It seems like a child with several parents. How, exactly, does it all work out?*

Kapera: The only change on this end has been the exclusion of WOTC from the production process. During *Doomtown*'s first two years, WOTC licensed the rights to produce the game from Pinnacle, who own the rights. They, in turn, contracted the AEG design team to create the mechanics and storyline. Now AEG is licensing the rights to design and produce the cards in-house. That's pretty much it.

Pyramid: What about Wizards of the Coast's Doomtown fan club? Did it survive the move?

Kapera: Yes, though I'm really not the person to talk to about the details. All I know right now (as Lead Story Writer) is that a revised Epitaph is in the works, along with plans for an in-house Quickdraw League.

Pyramid: The **Doomtown CCG** *is similar to the* **Legend of the Five Rings CCG** *in that they are both story driven.*

*Before **Doomtown** left Wizards of the Coast, its first story arc came to an epic end. Just in case someone missed it, can you summarize what all went on, which outfits survived and which didn't?*

Kapera: Wow. That's a tall order. As with any story-driven game (and especially with a game having so many factions, characters, etc.), it's difficult to explain everything in one breath. But here it goes, anyway:

The first story-arc revolved around two key figures: a powerful manitou named Knicknevin, who was intent on making Gamorra his own little "Kingdom" on Earth, and Austin Stoker, a mysterious Harrowed gunslinger determined to save the town.

There were a lot of other folks involved (most of which are familiar to Deadlands players), including the Agency (the "Men in Black" of the Weird West), Blackjacks (outlaws), Collegium (mad scientists), the Flock (religious fanatics devoted to a questionable cause), Law Dogs (Sheriff Nate Hunter and his deputies), Maze Rats (Chinese pirates and sorcerers), Sioux Nation (Indian shamans and spiritual warriors), Sweetrock Mining Corporation ('nuff said), Texas Rangers (Confederate zombie hunters who often utilize their prey), and the Whateleys (degenerate, old-world hucksters and occultists). Gamorra rests on one of the largest veins of ghost rock (super fuel) ever seen in the Weird West and, initially, everyone vied for control of it and the town.

As the story progressed, however, we discovered the true threat (Knicknevin), and the fact that everyone would have to fight the manitou if they wanted to survive.

Whew!

All that said, there were victims across the board. Better than half of Gamorra's inhabitants and locations were lost in the epic battle with Knicknevin, which was enacted in the Kingdom Come tournament held in mid-to-late 1999. One faction, the Flock, was lost entirely, though Elijah the Prophet (their leader) escaped during the carnage.

***Pyramid:** Well, after looking at **Doomtown**'s past story arc, can you give us a hint of where it is going next? I would think that it is going to be hard to top battling a demon from the Hunting Grounds.*

Kapera: Yes, it will, though I've concocted a scheme that I hope will work for the purpose. When I first pitched it to Pinnacle and my bosses at AEG, there was a moment of stunned silence, which I think is a good sign.

Since we are talking about this prior to the release of the new Basic Set, details are being held pretty close to the vest. This is what I can tell you right now:

1. The Boot Hill Basic Set takes place immediately after Revelations' Kingdom Come and documents Gamorra as it looks right after Knicknevin's rampage. The first expansion, ***Ashes to Ashes***, will take place one year in the future (Spring, 1878), and bring a host of new elements to the boomtown, including both sides of the Civil War, the rail lines of the Great Rail Wars (including a new one, based exclusively in Gamorra), and a blooming threat that will ultimately change the game setting forever.
2. We're increasing the scope of the game. Instead of dealing only with the town, you'll now be playing across the entire Gamorra Valley with the city being a location in and of itself. This will allow us to tell a much larger, more epic story than ever before. Also, we will be touching on other aspects of the Weird West formerly only dealt with in the ***Deadlands RPG***.

***Pyramid:** What new outfits can we expect to see?*

Kapera: There will be one and it is to be released early in the new story arc. They are called the Lost Angels, Elijah's new band. They're based in part of the material presented in the ***Lost Angels*** sourcebook for the ***Deadlands RPG***, though we're only borrowing half the central premises for Reverend Grimme's group. The other half are staying in house with Pinnacle for use in their upcoming releases.

The Lost Angels will play a major role in the storyline, though I can't reveal the specifics at this time. What I *can* tell you is that they'll feature honest-to-God angels (pun only partially intended), Grimme's Guardian Angels

"shocktroops", and a couple new surprises we've designed expressly for Doomtown.

Pyramid: I'm sure there will be other new characters to fill the ranks left open from the battle with Knicknevin. Will there be any changes to some of the old ones?

Kapera: Many of the original characters will be back, but we will be focusing on a new generation of heroes and villains, giving Gamorra a "facelift," as it were.

Pyramid: How about the diminutive bartender, Charlie Landers? Will he still be around? He seemed to be at ground zero for many events last time, with a lot of the cards' flavor text coming from him.

Kapera: Charlie was the first set's principal narrator, sort of the "Greek chorus" for ***Doomtown***. This time around, he's only one of the narrators, and we're going to be shaking up his world a bit. Throughout the next two years, Charlie will find himself drawn into the events swirling around him rather than remaining the isolated viewer. We're hoping this will give him a more passionate perspective. As a result, however, he may grow slightly less cynical over time, as is to be expected with those who have a vested interest in their surroundings.

Pyramid: What, exactly, does the new Basic Set consist of? How many factions, cards, and so on?

Kapera: Nine of the factions introduced in the original story-arc return in the ***Boot Hill*** basic set. As I mentioned, the Flock were obliterated in the Kingdom Come tournament. The set will consist of just over 300 cards (318, I believe), with nine new faction-specific weapons being one of the highlights.

Pyramid: Will the cards look the same, so that the new ones will be compatible with the old ones?

Kapera: All the cardbacks, borders, and spot art is consistent with previous releases, and will remain so. AEG is determined to produce an extension of the original story-arc, not a replacement. Further, all cards (even those eliminated in the storyline, such as Flock Dudes and such) will be accepted in tournaments. Certain storyline events may place certain restrictions upon deck construction, however, in the fashion of the "Jade-Legal" tourneys for ***L5R***. Of course, any such tournament restrictions would be announced ahead of time, as a courtesy to the players.

*Pyramid: If eliminated cards can show up in tournaments, that certainly confirms that death doesn't have quite the final word in the **Deadlands** setting as it does in real life.*

Kapera: Remember that line in Pet Sematary? "Sometimes, dead is better?" Well, I think players will be attaching a new meaning to that statement. In fact, I *guarantee* it. . .

*Pyramid: Patrick, **Doomtown** has a particular look. Will the artwork still be supplied by the same group of artists?*

Kapera: For the most part, yes. AEG has its own art director, Jim Pinto, who is eagerly searching for new and fresh talent. *Ashes to Ashes*, the first regular expansion for the new story-arc, features quite a few of his newest finds, and they have offered up some truly amazing work! Expect ***Doomtown*** to put on a fresh face in the coming months, while retaining the same high quality you've come to expect.

By the way, if any aspiring artists are reading this, you can contact Jim at the AEG offices by calling (909) 390-5444 and asking for the art director or by sending a portfolio to:

Alderac Entertainment Group
ATTN: Jim Pinto
4045 Guasti #212
Ontario, CA 91766

Pyramid: Will some cards continue to be more rare than others?

Kapera: Yes. Following the traditional CCG format, there will be Common, Uncommon, and Rare cards, based on

their mechanical abilities, storyline impact, and such. The distribution of cards in upcoming sets is largely the same as before.

Pyramid: Are the rules and card mechanics staying the same? I think many fans have the "It ain't broke so you'd better not fix it!" mentality towards Doomtown.

Kapera: We aren't changing anything, though we may add a few things in upcoming sets, such as new victory conditions, traits, and so on. As the game progresses, new card combinations and possibilities present themselves.

Rest assured that we are always working to keep the players on their toes, even while maintaining the same flavor and style of game play that you're used to.

Pyramid: Have any release dates been determined yet?

Kapera: For the most part. Right now, the **Boot Hill** basic set is due out in April and is on schedule, as far as I know. The first three expansions of the new story-arc are planned as follows:

Episode One (Ashes to Ashes): May 2000
Episode Two (Eye for an Eye): GenCon 2000
Episode Three (Do Unto Others): December 2000

*Pyramid: Finally, Patrick, since you are the Lead Story Writer, I have one more question for you. If someone hasn't played **Doomtown** before, what would you say to convince them to give it a try?*

Kapera: Three things:

1. It's easy to learn. In fact, I'll show you how if you find me at the summer cons.
2. It's fun to play. I'm not just the storyteller, I'm also a player.
3. You can't beat the story!

GURPS Raptors

by Christine Morgan

Based on and inspired by *Raptor Red*, a novel by Dr. Robert T. Bakker

References: *GURPS Dinosaurs*, *GURPS Basic Set (3rd Edition)*, *GURPS Compendium I*, *GURPS Fantasy Folk*, *GURPS Bestiary*.

Introduction

In nearly every book, movie, and RPG that features dinosaurs, they are cast as monsters. The humans, be they time travelers or historically inaccurate cavemen or modern genuises who have somehow re-introduced dinos into the world, must face, flee, or overcome.

The main characters themselves are rarely dinosaurs, with a few exceptions usually found on the children's shelf of your local video store -- these talking and singing dinos are another variant of the "cutesy-animal" subgenre of entertainment. They're little people who happen to look like dinosaurs. Not *real* dinosaurs, with real dinosaurian needs and behaviors (except for the occasional nod in the direction of eating habits and avoiding predators).

One book stands apart from and above all the rest when it comes to depicting dinosaurs as actual characters. This is *Raptor Red*, a novel by renowned paleontologist Robert T. Bakker. Not only is it one of the best dinosaur books out there, it belongs near the top of the list of *the* best books. Ever. Period.

Raptor Red turns dinosaurs from fascinating monsters into believable, compelling characters. It is wonderfully written, light-hearted and dramatic, a story played out against the natural background for these creatures, as realistic as one of the world's foremost dinosaur experts can deliver.

What would it be like to run a game in such a setting? Many of the gaming elements are there -- problem solving, character interaction, combat, treasure (in the form of plentiful food), survival.

Wouldn't it be fun to play a Raptor?

Utahraptor (adapted from GURPS Dinosaurs)

ST: 30-35
DX: 15
IQ: 10 *
HT: 15/30
Speed: 13
Dodge: 7
PD/DR: 1/1 most of body, 0/0 on lowest part of underbelly

(* *GURPS Dinosaurs* gives pretty much all the species an IQ of 3, and the raptors an IQ of 3-4; The truly dedicated GM could use the method of adjustment from *GURPS Bunnies and Burrows*, but given the tremendous variety of species, sizes, and stats among the Cretaceous population ... it is far easier to simply bump their average IQ to 10 and adjust the IQ of the other species accordingly, with most of the prey-types ranging from 6-8. "Hers was a beautifully alert and sentient species" -- Preface to *Raptor Red*.)

Description

Size: 6-7 hexes
Height: 8 feet
Length: 20 feet
Weight: 600-800 lbs
Hide: dull brown/red, shaded to paler tan on underbelly; snout markings.**
Eyes: gold or yellow, tinged from greenish to coppery to orange.
Note: females will tend toward the higher ends of ST and Weight than males.

Reach: C, 1, 2 (hind leg kick)
Damage, bite: 1d6 cutting
Damage, hand claws: 2d6-1 cutting
Damage, kick with toe claw: 3d6+1 impaling
Damage, flying strike with toe claws: 4d6-1 impaling

Development

Hatching to 1 year -- infancy
1 year to 2 years -- chickhood
2 years to 3 years -- adolescence
3 years on -- adulthood

Racial Advantages (+151)

Acute Taste and Smell +2 (+4)
Acute Vision +2 (+4)
Cast Iron Stomach (+15)
Thick Hide (+28) -- tough skin, PD/DR 1/1 except on underbelly.
Nictating Membrane (+10)
Penetrating Call (+5)
Strikers, hand claws (+25)
Strikers, toe claws (+40)
Strikers, teeth (+5)
Discriminatory Smell (+15) +4 to Tracking skill.

Racial Disadvantages

Phobia (-10) -- shadows from above, instinctive reaction.
Phobia (-10) -- bugs, disease and infection.
Raptor Code of Honor (-15) -- look after your own offspring first; siblings and mates help protect and provide for each other; don't waste time on anyone else.
Intolerance (-10), other species of Raptors. **

Several Advantages and Disadvantages, for a variety of mostly obvious reasons, are not suited to a Raptor character. As always, the GM's decision is final.

Unsuitable Advantages and Disadvantages would most likely include those related to: technology, literacy, drugs and alcohol, the military, the law, religion, wealth, fashion, languages, magic, music, martial arts, social/cultural connections, plants and animals, psionics, super powers, the occult, and phobias of things that do not exist in the Cretaceous world.

Many physical Disadvantages would not be found in Raptor characters, as physical capability is a must for survival, and any Raptor too physically limited would have a hard time living to maturity.

Raptor Skills

Area Knowledge, Body Language, Brawling, Camouflage, Climbing, Cyphering (default only), First Aid, Fishing, Intimidation, Jumping, Jump Kick (maneuver), Kicking (maneuver), Tail Strike (maneuver), Leadership, Naturalist, Running, Savoir Faire, Sex Appeal, Stealth, Survival (varying types), Swimming, Tactics, Teaching, Throwing, Tracking.

New Raptor-Specific Skills

Scent-Marking (M/E)
Raptors use this skill to mark territory and leave signals, using throat-glands (rubbing against something to "mark" it in much the same way that a cat might do) and dung. Scent markers fade over time, and can also be purposefully disturbed by covering them with earth or overlaying with a fresher scent.

Nest-Building (P/E)
Once Survival has been used to locate an acceptable sleeping site, a Raptor will use this skill to scrape together and collect branches and leaves to create a comfortable spot to bed down.

Mating Dance (P/A)
This skill is more important in males than in females, because males have the burden of courting while females have the luxury of choosing. It is an act in two parts. The first half is the Courtship Dance, at the end of which the female makes a Reaction roll and indicates whether she is interested or not. If so, the male may begin the second and more difficult half, which is at a -3 to skill. Modifiers: any footing penalties for terrain; a gift of food adds +2 to the female's Reaction roll.

Grooming (P/E)
This skill is used to keep the skin and claws clean, and is also used in a variety of social encounters (affectionate, comforting, etc.).

Sleeping Habits

Dirunal / Nocturnal -- A Raptor may only be one or the other of these. Dirunals rise before dawn, and are at their best early in the day. Nocturnals are slower-starting in the morning but stay up and alert farther into the night.

Raptor Communication

Raptors communicate by means of a complex series of postures, motions, head-bobs, lip-curls, play bites, grooming, snout bumps, and nuzzles.

Verbal communication is limited to the high-pitched yelping "distress call," a keening wail used to express grief, cooing noises of affection, and screeching, snarling, and bellowing to express threats.

The "All-Out" threat gesture, which gives a Raptor +2 to Intimidation skill rolls, consists of a lot of noise, waving of the foreclaws, and raking the air with the deadly toe-claws.

Raptors at rest will sit upright with torsos erect and heads held high, the better to spot potential prey and dangers. When sleeping, they do so sitting but leaning against each other, usually facing the same way all in a row.

The most complex and important piece of Raptor communication is the mating dance. This is usually initiated by the male and includes an exaggerated series of ritual motions (see above, Mating Dance skill). Mates are taken monogamously for life, so this is not somethung undertaken lightly.

Pack Bonds

Packs are held together by bonds between mates and families. This is fine so long as the hunting is good, but in times of drought or famine, such bonds begin to dissolve and it becomes a matter of every Raptor for itself. A pack may also be faced with the decision of whether or not to abandon the youngest chicks, because a female without chicks to tend will stand a better chance of surviving herself to breed again.

Other factors that can lead to the breaking up of pack bonds include injury or death of a member, personality conflicts and disputes, and natural disasters such as fires, floods, or earthquakes that put physical distance and barriers between pack members.

Disease and Injury

Ticks and other bugs carry diseases that can prove fatal to Raptors. Some types of birds can serve a function much as they do for rhinos and other large animals, by plucking ticks from beneath the skin.

Choosing a nesting site free from such hazards requires a Survival roll, while locating and encouraging birds to remove ticks is part of Raptor First Aid.

First Aid also includes licking wounds (regains 1 HT on the first day and prevents infection), coating them in mud (eases pain), and provision of food and shelter for an injured Raptor by other pack members (gives +1 to the daily HT roll).

Because of their diet, their keen sense of smell, and their ability to regurgitate, Raptors are not very vulnerable to food poisoning or toxic plants.

Deadly Stepfathers and Other Hazards

One of the greatest dangers facing Raptor chicks is the male of the species. Just as a lion taking control of a tribe will kill cubs sired by his predecessor in order to bring the lionesses into season, a male Raptor with a new mate is instinctively programmed to kill off any chicks from her previous relationship.

He has no genetic investment in them, and therefore it is a waste of his time to protect and provide for them when he could be encouraging the female to start up a new family carrying his own genes.

Chicks are often the target of other predators. Competition for game is fierce, and it makes sense to get rid of the other team while they're still young and helpless. This, too, is seen among lions, who will hunt down and slaughter leopard and cheetah cubs. But, again like a lioness, there are few things fiercer than a female Raptor defending her offspring.

Sample Character: Yellow Streak

ST: 30
DX: 15
IQ: 10
HT: 15/30
Speed: 13
Dodge: 7
PD/DR: 1/1 most of body, 0/0 on lowest part of underbelly

Racial Advantages and Disadvantages as above (+106)

Personal Advantages: Alertness +3 (+15)

Personal Disadvantages: Cowardice (-10), Greed (-15), Gluttony (-5)

Skills: Body Language-10, Brawling-12, Camouflage-10, Climbing-12, First Aid-10, Jumping-12, Jump Kick (maneuver)-12, Kicking (maneuver)-12, Tail Strike (maneuver)-12, Naturalist-10, Running-18, Stealth-18, Survival (plains)-11, Swimming-10, Throwing-10, Tracking-12, Scent-Marking-11, Nest-Building-12, Mating Dance-9, Grooming-10.

Description
Height: 7 1/2 feet
Length: 18 feet
Weight: 600 lbs
Age: 3 years, just post-adolescent
Notable feature: vivid yellow streak running from corners of mouth along jawline to meet at back of neck and halfway down his back.

Yellow Streak's name fits him both physically and in terms of personality. The 'runt' of the litter, he grew up with two older, pushy, bossy siblings. He always felt left out, picked on, and deprived.

Now that he is out of the family unit and on his own, he conducts himself more like a scavenger than a predator. The first hint of danger has him ready to move, but his fight-or-flight reaction is always heavily leaning toward "flight."

Because he never felt like he got his fair share of the food, now he is greedy and will not only gorge himself but haul away as much as he can carry, and snarl at smaller scavengers even if he's too stuffed to move. He knows that he is expected to go out there and find a mate, but the prospect scares him silly.

The Two Percent

About a month ago, *Pyramid Magazine* ran a poll to glean how many of the readers were women who were actively involved in the gaming hobby. The result, out of nearly 1500 respondents, was that only two percent -- thirty-odd readers from the ages of seventeen to thirty -- were women. This contradicted the Wizards of the Coast survey, which had reported a much higher percentage of participation of 30%. Although the polls are far from scientific, it is still a point of valuable feedback, not just on the magazine, but also on the hobby as a whole.

One theory on the low response - mine - was that a substantial number of those who did *not* respond to that week's poll were the missing 27%. Another theory said that Wizard of the Coast's numbers were high and women were a firm minority in the hobby. The reality is likely somewhere in between.

Even if Wizards of the Coast's numbers are correct, thirty percent does not mean equality. The cross-market penetration of gaming feels dangerously low. Are women being marginalized by the industry? Has the industry simply given up on them, considering them not to be a viable customer base?

There are varieties of reasons why the numbers of women in gaming are shockingly low. The following analysis lists ten possible major problem areas contributing to the reason why there aren't many women in gaming. They're roughly ordered from the most important to the least important, although any one of them might be seen as a factor.

1. **Goal-Oriented Instead of Story-Oriented Games.**
   There's a visceral pleasure gamers receive from going into a dungeon, killing the hordes of orcs, and gaining a level. These goal-oriented games are extremely popular, have been for twenty-five years, and will continue to be far into the future. But, they don't sell to women who are looking for a more story-oriented and character driven game. Women gamers want something that involves their characters and their characters' lives more than the next biggest weapon or the next biggest treasure. They want to be given very personal reasons for being involved in the game, be it demons killing children or evil mages murdering their parents. Plenty of game systems simply aren't designed with this sort of personal roleplay in mind, and emphasize the "quest" nature of gaming -- *Shadowrun*, many AD&D modules, and several Palladium games come under this moniker.

   This secret was discovered by the folks over at White Wolf, who created a product that left behind the traditional dungeon delving for more new-age soul delving. Instead of offering a world where the player's existence revolved around treasure and nasty monsters, they offered a world where the player was forced to face down their inner demons. While not everyone's cup of tea, this kind of game is enormously successful, and White Wolf is able to boast that that more than half of their fans are women.

2. **Number-Crunching Based Systems Instead of Story-Telling Based Systems.**
   The hobby of roleplaying hails back to its original wargaming roots from twenty or more years ago, where the mark of a fine system was an attention to detail that it could give to its adherents - the more detailed, the better. (For a fine example, go find a few original *Dungeons & Dragons* supplements.) These complicated systems offered an enormous amount of control of the game world to their fans, but at the same time created a steep learning curve that kept away those players who were either new to gaming or desired a less system oriented, more character based drama. Historically, women who wanted to game either dealt with the complicated system, or didn't play at all.

   Today, this philosophy of game design is changing. Gaming systems are becoming simpler and lowering the barrier to entry, such as the *Tri-Stat* system from Guardians of Order or *Feng-Shui*. Those systems which are geared at the wargaming fan base are releasing simplified versions of their rules. But there is enough complexity that the heavily number-oriented systems still outnumber the lighter ones, and the game itself is still a barrier to women who would like to game, but just don't get it.

3. **Sexist Art.**
   One has to wonder if the women in gaming fantasy art get cold. They're not wearing much, and from the flow of

the few strips of cloth draped around their bodies, they're obviously standing somewhere very windy.

Gaming art does not have the woman gamer in mind. Instead, it's aimed at a much different audience - seventeen-year-old boys. Fantasy is the worst offender of all the genres, taking a nod from the comic book industry by presenting women as disproportioned Barbie dolls while men are well clothed and well-armored. The unrealistic art, which occasionally borders on soft pornography, can be seen as offensive -- or worse. More women would come to play if everyone was simply dressed appropriately. If the characters are depicted standing in the snow, the women should be wearing just as many furs as the men. If the characters are standing in the desert, the men should be just as naked as the women.

4. **Lack of Peers.**
   The lack of women gamers is a cycle that, ultimately, feeds on itself. Traditionally, there aren't very many women in gaming, so there aren't many peers in their social group, and then women don't come to play. It's much like any other minority group trying to make its way into the majority.

   To get more women in gaming, there needs to be more women who are actively playing games and raising the flag telling others that it's safe to join. More women means more peers, which ultimately means more women, more customers, and more gamers.

5. **Expensive Product.**
   Gaming is becoming an increasingly expensive hobby with the new "sourcebook of the month" culture. While the main sourcebook for most games is still a reasonably-priced book, with most falling into the $30-$40 range (except for White Wolf's Limited Editions, which shoot off the map), it seems that the core book is no longer the only book required to play the game. Roleplaying games are not just game systems anymore. They're a marriage.

   New gamers can no longer simply take home a book from their local gaming store, get together with their friends, and play it. They quickly discover that they need to drop a hundred on GMs and Players supplements to actually play the game, and nearly $1000 to learn all there is to know about the system. While the traditional argument on the topic of pricing is that it's "pay once, play forever," it's too forbidding to those who just want to buy a book to learn about roleplaying or begin to be involved in the hobby.

6. **Marketing to the Outside.**
   Traditionally, outside of ***Advanced Dungeons and Dragons*** and more recently, ***Pokemon***, there had been very little mass-market advertising for the gaming industry as a whole. Most introductions to the hobby were through word of mouth by peer group. Women, not being part of the peer group, were never introduced to gaming.

   This is changing, slowly, as gaming is starting to take hold as part of popular culture. With blockbuster video games such as *Diablo* and *Planescape: Torment*, big box-office movies like *Lord of the Rings*, and the popularity of Japanese animation on basic cable, gaming is starting to find new avenues in which to get new players. While it might be too little, too late to snag the target demographic of older women, there are signs that it will reach the younger next generation, as games based on popular series such as *Sailor Moon* are selling well to young girls.

7. **Marketing to the Inside.**
   Gaming is an insular hobby, much like amateur astronomy or model trains. The only location for advertisements of different game brands are in gaming magazines or gaming catalogues, where gamers who are already in the hobby are going to see them. Because the hobby is overwhelmingly male, these advertisements go the step farther by targeting the male demographic exclusively. Few women are going to see the advertisement for the spiffy new game. Even fewer are going to be attracted to game whose advertisement focuses on how realistic the combat is modeled and less on the game play itself.

8. **The Boy's Clubhouse.**
   To the outsider, gaming is perceived as a man's hobby, played by men, written by men, and run by men. It's considered a man's hobby, the equivalent of Sunday night football, where men get together and do manly (or not so manly) things. The perception is that gaming night is much like poker night, except with dice instead of cards.

There just isn't any place for women.

Is this the way it is with everyone? Of course not. It's a stereotype, not a reality, and there are women friendly groups out there who maintain a gender balance. Furthermore, many women in gaming were never told they weren't supposed to be gamers, so they went ahead and did it anyway. But prevalent attitudes are what they are, and many women who feel they aren't welcome are likely just to take their time, business, and money elsewhere.

9. **When There Is a Grown Man in a *Sailor Moon* Outfit, It's Time to go Home.**
   It's difficult to indoctrinate mainstream customers to a hobby whose face is that of the comic bookstore owner from the *Simpsons*. Not all, or even many, gamers embody this stereotype, but it has become so inexorably linked to the hobby that it is almost impossible to get past it to introduce one's girlfriend or wife to a new hobby. And just as one finishes arguing that gamers aren't like that, someone pastes a picture of a grown, overweight, bearded man in a *Sailor Moon* outfit to the net.

10. **Not-So-Friendly Local Gaming Stores.**
    It is not unusual for women gamers to have to stand at the counter to buy their books for a long time before anyone comes to ring them up - even with the helpful Sales Guy standing two feet away. They almost have to beg to get the same attention as their male counterparts.

    Far worse is *too much* attention. Not every customer that walks into the store is datable material, and there's nothing like being hit on by the too-friendly staff. It's uncomfortable, it's degrading, and more often than not, she's not interested in anything past handing her money over for a new supplement. Nothing will guarantee that a woman customer will not return faster than chatting her up, looking for date material.

    Game stores tend to be, for the most part, extremely friendly places to go. But a few bad experiences will keep the women gamers out permanently.

Today blows the winds of change, as the gaming industry realizes it can no longer neglect one half of the population and still be competitive in a splintering marketplace. There are several examples in action:

- White Wolf posts almost the same split between their gamer bases, and they need women gamers to keep their company healthy.
- Guardian of Order's *Sailor Moon* roleplaying game has sold hundreds of copies to girls between the ages of 10-14.
- *Call of Cthulhu*, with its human themes and character driven plots, brings women gamers to both the table and the LARP.
- The later *Advanced Dungeons and Dragons* material, far removed from its wargamer roots, offered worlds with engaging female characters, story based worlds, and themes women can really get their teeth into and enjoy.

The answer to the question if the industry has abandoned its female gamers, is that it hasn't. There's a concerted effort to bring women into gaming, instead of away. The gaming industry is maturing, and in its own way, it is addressing each of these problems in turn. The number of women gamers who are now playing is much higher than it was ten years ago, or even five.

These things take time, and change *cannot* be the responsibility of the game designers or the gaming companies alone. Most of the burden of change weighs on the shoulders of the gamers themselves -- to provide peers, to treat women with dignity, to introduce stories into their games, and to get them to play, hooking them on the game itself.

Trust me; it's worth it.

Pyramid Review

Wasteland (a supplement for the *Obsidian RPG*)

Published by [Apophis Consortium](#)

Written by Micah Skarita, Fav Harnish, Brian Bradley, Tim Akers, and Mike Slivka

208 pages, $20.00

Obsidian is an almost fascinating game idea plagued by countless typographic errors, layout mistakes, and general amateurish writing and editing. Wasteland, the first supplement for the game, is a marked improvement over what has come before, but still far from perfect.

Obsidian takes place in our future, after Hell has consumed a large portion of the Earth and the "civilized" survivors of humanity live in a city called "The Zone." If you think of Judge Dredd you won't be far off. The best overview you can read if you aren't familiar with *Obsidian* is this [review by Derek Guder](#) on [rpg.net](#). Outside the city is where *Wasteland* takes place: a devastated, desert-like environment where Hell has started to take over completely. It's another big "kewl" element to the entire game world and is explained in fairly good detail in chapter one.

Appearance

A 208-page softcover book with a beautiful cover by Christopher Shy and excellent print quality, the first hurdle a customer has to leap is the poor cover design. The title is in a "battered typewriter" font colored black on a very dark red background making it disappear almost completely. The text along the bottom of the cover, reading "A Supplement for *Obsidian*," is even more difficult to read. The back cover text is set in blue on a very dark image and is close to impossible to read. These problems would be less significant for an established company, but for a second product from a new publisher they could cause serious damage and make already existing *Obsidian* customers miss the book completely.

The interior of the book is plagued with constant small layout problems which would be invisible to most gamers but frequently bothered me. The worst problem is where each chapter ends; the layout artist chose to leave a massive white gap (sometimes a complete column) rather than commission artwork specifically for the holes. These layout concerns of mine are probably non-problems for most gamers.

On the plus side most of the art in the book is of an excellent quality and reminds me of the better artwork published by White Wolf and some of what can be found in the SLA Industries books. Unfortunately, the art is the best part of the book.

Content

The first thing I found slightly odd about the book was the low number of chapters (only five) for such a large book (over 200 pages). The first real problem I found with the text was the opening story which is as bad as any game fiction can get. The story was confusing at best, and boring in several instances. The book would have been better if the story had been left out completely.

Chapter One, titled "Wasted Earth," is the overview and introduction to the area known as Wasteland--the area outside

The Zone. From descriptions of the towns inhabited by those known as Exiles (people forced from The Zone, typically criminals) to the creatures living in the Wasteland, every page is loaded with ideas any post-apocalyptic gamemaster will find somewhat interesting. The most useful section of this chapter for gamemasters running post-apocalyptic games will be the town descriptions (though several towns are nothing more than above-ground dungeons where you can kill things)and the "dungeon" information. The information on "Tainted Earth" (the areas of desert where Hell has manifested, represented by foul, odor-filled air which is difficult to breathe and a horribly decayed landscape) is interesting and could be a good addition to a *Dark Conspiracy* campaign.

The second chapter, "Wastelanders," gives information on characters and groups in the Wastelands. Why the section on towns was included here and not detailed in the previous chapter with the town descriptions is something that troubles me slightly. The in-depth study on Coliseum Tournaments, Thunderdome-style gladiator matches, just helps heighten the feeling that this book (and game) is all about killing things. The listing and detailed descriptions of possible contacts characters may have in the *Wasteland* is actually decently-written and useful for just about any post-apocalyptic campaign.

As in the *Obsidian* rulebook, the weapons and equipment section begins to go overboard. Chapter Three covers body armor, weapons, equipment, and vehicles in fairly good detail. One complaint is they don't call guns what they are but instead refer to them as ordnance. This gets a little annoying at times, but other than that the chapter is any munchkin power gamer's dream. What do I mean by that? Consider this example:

> "THE CRUSADER -- This four-foot long ordnance is by far the most cost-effective weapon available. Not only is it a firearm, it doubles as a sword in close combat. Along both sides of the gun is a serrated blade that travels from the end of the barrel back to the chamber. The stock of the weapon has a handle built in so the user can wield the gun as a sword. For the most part this weapon is a modified Revco with an extended barrel and attached blades. On the downside, maintenance of these weapons is extremely difficult due to the mounted swords along the side."

It goes on from there. Maybe these guys should consider releasing a book of ordnance.

Chapter four is an in-depth and exhausting look at numerous military factions, tribes (better known as gangs), daemons (demons from Hell), and a "way kewl" section titled "Starving Religions" (which would actually be a great name for a band). Many parts of the book seem to suffer from excessive, almost indulgent, violent descriptions. A good example of what I mean is this short quote taken from the description of a daemon labeled RED FACE:

"Named after the dried blood on their face (usually around their mouth) . . . "

There are several descriptions of troops, daemons, and other factions with descriptions that begin in a manner similar to Red Face's.

The book closes with a collection of new rules and corrections to rules in the *Obsidian* main rulebook. This chapter is only of value to *Obsidian* players (of which I would guess there are very, very few).

If *Wasteland* were any more expensive it would be difficult to recommend it to anyone. As it is, if you are currently running a post-apocalyptic campaign and have the spare cash to spend on a campaign "tool kit," I would suggest tracking down Wasteland and stripping out the information you find interesting and useful. If you already have *Obsidian* you owe it to yourself to check out this first supplement, which is a major improvement in terms of quality over the main rulebook. Any *Rifts* fans in the audience will need to buy *Wasteland* for the "kewl" factor alone. "Storytelling" groups are better off finding other resources for their campaign.

-- Philip Reed

by Jon Darbro

Art by John Kovalic

Origins

You know, there should be a card game about our apartment. . .

Chez Geek makes me proud. It makes me proud that I've designed a game where a bunch
of players (who, probably now or at one time, spent or had roommates who spent a good
bit of their time sleeping, eating, watching TV, and assimilating various substances that
would inhibit future success in political elections) take on the roles of roommates who
spend a good bit of their time sleeping, eating, watching TV, and assimilating various
substances that would inhibit future success in political elections. It also makes me proud
that this game actually got *produced*. Finally, it makes me proudest to know that people
who buy this game are going to *love* taking on the roles of roommates who spend a good
bit of their time sleeping, eating -- you know the rest.

The idea germ began early in 1999. Three people sat around drinking wine at 3 AM
when they should have been sleeping. I spoke aloud the above quote. We chuckled and discussed cards based on our
friends. We decided that Slack should definitely be the goal of the game. . . somehow.

I don't know what work I was procrastinating at the time (probably applying to graduate school) but I became
alarmingly motivated to purchase index cards and two Osco markers. Voila! The first prototype of "The Game," as we
called it back then.

My friends (most of the playtesters) loved it. What could be better than calling up a bunch of your friends (and
interrupting their sleep or TV-watching) to come over and play a game where we invited over the *same* friends and
then slept or watched TV? It was a riot! Maybe it's the absurdity of going to the trouble of creating an alternate reality
for the purpose of a card game, just to do the same activities you'd do in this reality. Maybe it's because all of the TV
shows involved Hitler in that first prototype. I don't know why, but it works.

Game Balance. . . Who Needs It?

Tech Support Assistant
Slack Goal: 20
Income: 4
Free Time: 1

The above card was in the prototype deck of *Chez Geek*, but it was taken out when the

cardlist had to be shortened. It has the exact same Slack Goal as "Tech Support," but a lower Income and less Free Time. Conclusion: it is empirically worse than "Tech Support." Why did I put it in there? Well, it was funny, and it represented a friend of mine who had such a job ("Will J." will remain nameless).

Game balance in *Chez Geek* didn't matter to me. Particular cards were not omitted, or inserted in ludicrous multiples to make decks. It's all random. For instance, in playtesting the prototype deck, we discovered that the original version of "No Job" (Job Card) was much more likely to win games because of the tremendously low Slack Goal and the ease of gaining Slack through free means. Was it a big problem? Not really. It's not like the same person drew the "No Job" in the beginning of each game. It's not like we didn't all figure out that "No Job" was more likely to win. It's not like we didn't pummel the hell out of the poor guy playing No Job at the beginning of each game (some Rent here, a Phone Bill there, some cat pee on your bed here. . .).

I'm an advocate of natural selection through negative feedback in card gaming (fancy talk for ganging up on the person who's winning). When the SJ Games people went about cleaning up rules, I didn't mind one bit. I have infinite trust in human nature to be petty and vindictive, and that's what makes *Chez Geek* work!

Inside Jokes -- A Proposal to Make the World a Better Place

Joe: If I transcended morality, I could kill you.
Marcus: Sure, Joe, if you were. . . insane!

Our entire concept of poor Joe is partially defined by that snippet of conversation. It inspired me to design a *Chez Geek* card that will destroy a Person card, and I named it "Transcend Morality." Since SJ Games rightly assumed that not everyone on Earth is in on the private jokes of the inhabitants of *Chez Geek*, they amended the card to "Justifiable Homicide." That's fine with me, but *Chez Geek* was a lot funnier to us when it used proper names, brand names, and actually-spoken quotes.

There are quite a few examples of this. At the time I made the game, I worked in a lab where I was trying to perfect a protocol for the partial fractionation of non-axonemic proteins in male fly reproductive tissue. One of the original Job Cards, then, was "Dissector of Fly Testes." Didn't make the cut. Also not making the cut were the 5 *other* TV Card Titles with Hitler in the name. "History's Hitlery Mysteries" was my favorite. We watched a lot of the History Channel, which as we all know is a channel exclusively devoted to Hitler and trains.

I do understand the value for mass marketing and making a product approachable to all groups, but there is one thing I'd like to see in future versions of *Chez Geek*. If you're with me on this one, listen up. There is an email account (ChezGeek@hotmail.com) devoted exclusively to submitting players' ideas for cards (either Jobs, Things, Activities, or People) based on actual jobs, things, activities, or people. I've learned that little is funnier than the specificity of real life (possible exception of many "p" words, like pirate, panda, pants, and poop). After you've played *Chez Geek* for a bit, go ahead and email card suggestions. I'll personally make sure that SJ Games gets them. I can't make any promises, though, for my signature has bound my soul to a contract like a monogram on underwear.

Of course, no vulgarity or libel in card ideas is allowed. I can also tell you from

experience that overuse of Hitler will almost certainly not make it into the final product.

Well, that's pretty much all that I wanted to say about *Chez Geek*. I know you all have one burning question left on your minds: From which species of fly did you dissect testes, Jon?

Drosophila simulans, baby, *Drosophila simulans*!

When Laws of Average Attack!

Well, this week I *was* going to talk about *Voltron*. But some things have happened this week that have made me push that interesting (to me) column up a week:

1. Emily Dresner, in her column this week, discusses grown men dressed as Sailor Moon.
2. One of our columnists reported that he was the victim of a computer virus.
3. In my local grocery store express lane yesterday, the nimrod in front of me checked two items and paid half the total with a credit card and half with a check. . . for two bags of charcoal.
4. The old *Dungeons and Dragons* cartoon returns to Saturday mornings.

What does it all mean? Well, the *Dungeons and Dragons* cartoon means that I can forestall wallowing in animated nostalgia for another week, but that's beside the point. But what do express lanes, virii, and Sailor Moon-clad men have to do with each other? Well, the point of this editorial (or thesis statement, as they taught us in Article & Essay Workshop) is:

It only takes one.

Let's take the computer virus incident for a moment. (And, no, I'm not going to discuss whether or not it *really* happened; it's within the realm of possibility, and similar things have happened to other folks, so if you'd prefer think of this as an extended "What if?", feel free.) Lets say you are known to thousands of people, and receive hundreds of pieces of e-mail a week, and deal with dozens of files a month. How many people does it take to perform a malicious act that destroys a part of your life? One.

You're at a gaming convention. You meet hundreds of cool people, make some new friends, and generally reaffirm to yourself that this is a normal hobby. How many photos in the local paper of someone dressed like Sailor Moon does it take to convince the world at large otherwise? One.

It takes one clueless person in line, or one person treating you rudely, or one person committing a heinous act and blaming an RPG, to make you forget or discount every "normal" occurrence. When something unfortunate happens, people don't say (for example), "I can't *believe* all those strangers we passed who didn't try to rob me. Don't they know I'm carrying hundreds of dollars?" No, they complain that the streets aren't safe because of the one person who *did* rob them. I'm not saying this isn't a logical response, but it also greatly complicates matters for those who would try to make the world a better place. Let's say tough Anti-Grown-Men-In-Sailor-Moon-Costumes legislation was passed; even if it reduced the number of GMISMCs by 90%, that would still leave 10%, posing for the cameras and upsetting folks.

Fortunately, I also believe it works in reverse. It only takes one kind person to lend a hand if you're stranded on the side of the road. It only takes one good idea to turn a mediocre game supplement into something worthwhile. It only takes one friend with home-baked cookies to turn a bad day into a good one. It takes one strong-willed person to hang the jury of a guilty person. . . *or* an innocent one. If there *is* only one bad egg spoiling the batch, then that means you only need to find that one bad egg, and your problems are greatly reduced (until the next One comes along, of course).

In a feeble effort to tie this column into a discussion of gaming, I would propose that, in many RPGs, the players are "the ones." They are the ones who disrupt the status quo for GloboTechCorp, or stop the Prophecy, or concoct the schemes to control the world. They are the ones who make a difference, for good or ill. Occasionally focussing on that uniqueness can make the game feel charged with both the thrill and responsibility of being special. (Of course, it's also fun to play in a campaign where you *aren't* special.)

I would encourage you, in gaming or the real world, to try to place The One in perspective. Don't complain to the GM about the one cruddy session without placing it in perspective of all the good ones. Try not to let one rude person ruin your vacation. Protect yourself from that potential One, but try not to let that one change your life.

If you *do* get through the Express Lane in two minutes, make a point of remembering that. And if you're buying two bags of charcoal with half-check, half-charge, *please* don't get in front of me.

* * *

This week sees the debut of a new feature-ette, called Appendix Z. The purpose of this feature is to provide short, (hopefully) useful miscellaneous pieces for various games. I'm not intending for this to be an esoteric column (ala "Variant Bashing Damage Hit Table Resolution For Trout in **Otter: The Frolicking**"), which is why I wouldn't consider the **Fading Suns** variant rules from a few weeks ago to be under this banner. Rather, I'm hoping to make this a feature that, while possibly having a direct application for a specific game system, can hopefully be useful in other systems. Ideally it will provide possibilities for when I don't have much space left in a week, but want to squeeze in an extra (short) article.

I'll let you all know when (or if) I'll start accepting these for submissions. . . I have a few examples that I'll probably subject you all to in the next month or two, but I want to see peoples' reactions before I commit. So you may want to vote, and if you like the idea but dislike what I'm doing with it, feel free to [e-mail me](). Or if you have any other comments, don't hesitate to [e-mail me](). Or if you've given your toes interesting names. . . um, you may want to hesitate.

It's unavoidable; next week I'll probably talk about *Voltron*, and sometime soon I'll beg for hair.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Wiz War 5th Edition Expansion 1** (Although that card has probably appeared in other places, too; this is the version I have.)

(Four stars) "Sometimes a future incarnation will request that the hero perform a special act. The reason for the act might never be explained. . . . ('It is crucial that you make sure Jon Clifton gets to school today! Then bury ten pounds of Adamantium at these coordinates in the Gobi Desert.')"

Sieg Howl!: Werewolves of Deutschland

"Even in the territory where they believe they have conquered us, new resistance will spring up behind their backs time and time again . . . and like werewolves, brave as death, volunteers will strike the enemy and cut his life lines."
-- Reichsführer-SS Heinrich Himmler, speech of 18 October 1944

Listeners might have been forgiven for imagining it to be a joke in particularly poor taste, even for the Nazis. On the morning of April 1, 1945, Radio Germany announced that it was, for the time being, Radio Werwolf, and that thousands more werewolves had begun to destroy the invading Allies, slaughtering soldiers and bombing tank convoys from the Rhine to the Oder. It was, in the mordant words of Canadian historian Perry Biddiscombe (in the sole English-language academic work on the topic, *Werwolf! The History of the National Socialist Guerrilla Movement 1944-1946*), "'Propaganda of the Deed' in its purest form -- all propaganda, no actual deed . . ." But that's not quite accurate, as Biddiscome goes on to document: the Werwolf movement began as a military operation, became a secret resistance group, and ended in the shadows and fog of the Cold War. All that, and werewolves, too.

In September 1944, a tag-team of SS officials decided to take a leaf from their enemies' book. Specialists had studied the French Resistance, Russian partisans, and Polish Home Guard with an eye toward creating similar organizations to attack the Allies as they pressed further into the Reich. Its manpower would come primarily from Hitler Youth, with some specially-selected officers from the Waffen-SS and the Wehrmacht. Himmler tapped SS-Obergruppenführer Hans-Adolf Prützmann to head this group, known as "Werwolf" -- but under the auspices not of the Waffen-SS, the military arm, but the SS regional police inspectorate, the HPSSF. Although many other factors eventually drove the Werwolf groups from organized partisan activity into "death squad" type revenge-killings, this detachment from the regular armed forces set the stage right from the first. The Werwolf's best-known operation, "Undertaking Carnival" on March 25, 1945, resulted in the successful assassination of the American-appointed mayor of Aachen -- but depended upon Otto Skorzeny's SS-Jagdverband commandos rather than Werwolf recruits for cadre and support. Skorzeny, Bormann, Schellenberger, Kaltenbrunner, Göbbels, and other top Nazis all attempted to hijack Werwolf for their own empire-building purposes, which (along with the rapid Allied advance and Prützmann's lack of organization) rapidly turned the Werwolf group into an uncoordinated morass of small-unit guerrilla teams and so-called "Vehme" death-squads to execute "traitors to the Reich."

"These terrible courts were never formally abolished. They were reformed by various monarchs, but even in the nineteenth century it was said that they still existed, though very much underground. The Nazi 'werewolves' and resistance organizations fighting the Communist occupation of East Germany claimed that they were carrying on the tradition of the 'Chivalrous and Holy Vehm.' Perhaps they still are."
-- Arkon Daraul, *A History of Secret Societies*

But these weren't the first military werewolves to prowl the German moors and mountainsides. After World War I, Lieutenant Peter von Heydebreck formed a Freikorps unit called the "Wehrwolf" which the SA eventually absorbed. Its name, a pun on the German *wehr,* meaning "resistance," came from a popular 1910 novel, *Der Wehrwolf* by Hermann Löns, about the similarly-named guerrilla bands that harassed the Swedish invaders on the Lüneburg Heath during the 1630s. The Landsturm anti-Bonapartist resistance movement in 1813 may also have included "wehrwolf" units, and provided another organizational model for the Werwolf's military arm.

Its political, terrorist arm was explicitly modeled on the Vehmgericht, the medieval, possibly proto-Masonic "Free Knights of Westphalia" who meted out vigilante justice at crossroads, in forests, or in churchyards -- abodes of the dead, and (of course) of werewolves. The Vehm were either founded by Charlemagne in 772 (possibly as an outgrowth of his *luporii,* or elite 'wolf-men' foresters), or by the Emperor Charles IV in 1371 to preserve Templar wisdom in Germany. Or in 1180 by Westphalian free companions displaced after the wars of Frederick Barbarossa. Either way, it was definitely put down by 1470 when they attempted to try Emperor Frederick III for treason. Or by 1608 when they roused the countryside of Munster to riot and fled into Rosicrucianism. Or by French troops in 1811, the ones that the Landsturm "wehrwolves" rose to resist. Hmmm . . .

"[T]here is a story current amongst the Scythians and the Greeks in Scythia that once a year every Neurian turns into

a wolf for a few days, and then turns back into a man again. I do not believe this tale, but all the same they tell it, and swear to the truth of it."
-- Herodotus, *The Histories,* IV:105

Having come in full circle trying to track the Werwolves, let's see where following the werewolves can get us. Interestingly enough, the first mention of the werewolf in history also gets us back to Germany; Herodotus places the lycanthropic Neurians on the western border of Scythia north of the Carpathians -- in other words, Silesia and East Prussia By a fine coincidence, the latter was not only where Hitler kept his "Wolf's Lair" HQ but also the home province of Werwolf Obergruppenführer Prützmann -- hmmm. (And speaking of coincidences, the good, not-Nazi werewolves who fought witches with the [Benandanti](#) were from Livonia, the next province north. And St. Augustine, of all people, says that werewolves are witches. Is there a werewolf clan war going on along the Niemen River?)

Herodotus continues to describe the Neurians' neighbors as 'Androphagi' -- "man-eaters." And their neighbors are the 'Melanchlaeni' -- the "men in black cloaks," which reminds us that a stenciled, very MIBy, man in black coat and hat was a symbol of the WWII Werwolf death-squads. (Another Werwolf-SS symbol, the [Wolfsangel rune](#), is a crossed 'eihwaz' yew-rune, the yew being the tree of death. The 'eihwaz' is also the rune of the Hanged Man, which is, of course, one of the two ways the Vehm, and their Masonic brethren, executed traitors.) Pausanias, a later historian who's even more skeptical than Herodotus, nonetheless describes a tribe of Arcadians whose cannibalistic habits in worship of Zeus Lykaios enable them to become wolves (and apparently champion athletes). Cannibalism, black cloaks, human sacrifice cults -- those SS Werwolves have quite the lineage, don't they?

"God has given up the protection of the people . . . Satan has taken command . . . We Werewolves consider it our supreme duty to kill, to kill and to kill, employing every cunning and wile in the darkness of the night, crawling, groping through towns and villages, like wolves, noiselessly, mysteriously."
-- Josef Göbbels, Radio Werwolf broadcast, April 1945

By now you've noticed where we're going with this, I'm sure. Into your next ***GURPS Special Ops*** game, toss a team of Werwolf-SS werewolves recruited by their fellow-countryman Prützmann to defend the Third Reich using the Templar-Rosicrucian sorceries of the Vehmgerichte. Over their shoulder watch Men in Black, midnight SS uniforms and the cloaks of the Dark Man of the Witches melding into one. (The Werwolf groups around the witches' mount, the Brocken, were still giving the Soviet troops headaches well into 1947.) Whether the PCs are an OSS squad with silver bullets and GI guts, a ***Delta Green*** pursuit-and-capture team trying to beat the Russians to the secret of werewolvery, a Mossad unit with a line on a supernatural Fourth Reich, ***GURPS Voodoo*** Benandanti night-walkers hunting down Thule Bruderschaft In-Betweeners who hire some Werwolf muscle to even the odds, or a modern-day group of gun-runners who've suddenly stumbled onto some really hairy Russian mafia enforcers -- werewolves keep the game alive, even if they don't extend the same courtesy to the party.

"And even your name is an indication. Family names do not come from nowhere. Every Smith has an ancestor somewhere who was a smith. Every Fisher comes from a family that once fished. And your name is Wolf."
-- Anthony Boucher, "The Compleat Werewolf"

But we've got one last Nazi to hunt down, one who ties all this fun stuff and more together, and makes a super bad guy for that grim 'n' gritty "house of mirrors" ***GURPS Espionage-Horror*** crossover. An aristocrat of faultless Aryan lineage (stretching back as far as the Neurians?), he joined the SS as an honorary member in 1931. He recruited Himmler's masseur, Felix Kersten, a follower of Tibetan (Agarthan?) Buddhism. He assisted Himmler's pet psychic 'Weisthor' in the preparation of the SS cult center at Wewelsburg Castle in Westphalia (home of the Vehm) in 1933 and 1934, becoming SS adjutant to Himmler the next year. During the 1935-1939 period, he served as direct supervisor of SS Colonel and Grail scholar Otto Rahn. By 1943, he had been placed in command of the SS forces in northern Italy, from which lofty vantage point he saw that the war was lost. Later that year, he began negotiations with the Americans for conditional surrender; in 1944 he met with Pope Pius XII, and (they say) began transferring SS funds to the Vatican Bank (possibly in collusion with Skorzeny's ODESSA scheme). His greatest coup, though, was delivering General Reinhard Gehlen and his files on the Soviet Union to OSS agent (eventually CIA Director) Allen Dulles in Switzerland just as the war was ending, allowing the nascent CIA to absorb the Gehlenapparat and use it -- including its Werwolf teams -- for anti-Soviet activity in Europe. But it's all in a day's work for SS Obergruppenführer

Karl . . . Wolff.

Pyramid Review

The Way of the Minor Clans (for the L5R RPG)

Published by [AEG](#)

Compiled by Ree Soesbee

128 pages, $19.95

The *Way of the Minor Clans* is the ninth in the Clan Book series. As opposed to other "single" clan books, it contains information about the twelve minor clans.

There are currently nine more-or-less active Minor Clans in Rokugan. Each one of these occupies about 10 pages and one chapter of the book. The final chapter details the three "lost" clans. Each chapter gives information about the clan's history, what other clans think of it, its techniques, new spells and skills, important NPCs and ancestors, etc. Below is a short description of each chapter.

Introduction

Like all the other Clan Books, this one starts with a short story. This piece is called "Nightmares," and it tells how shugenja Ryosei became the daimyo of the Fox clan. According to the story, it looks like the book is set in the time after the SCC (If you don't know what that is, I won't spoil it for you here). This is a surprise, since the whole earthshaking event (known from the collectable card game) isn't even yet presented in the RPG storyline. According to AEG, however, this will corrected in the very near future. . .

Chapter I: The Mantis

The strongest of the Minor Clans resides in the Islands of Silk and Spice. Mantis has a colorful history, including a failed coup attempt against the Emperor himself. There is also a lot of interesting information about sailing in the seas of Rokugan, including bits about pirates and trade routes, as well as details about different ship types. The Mantis Bushi School shows the brutal martial power of this Minor Clan. Clan daimyo Yoritomo is presented in the "Who's Who" section. There is also a page with new peasant weapons with illustrations.

Chapter II: The Fox

When kami Shinjo left the Rokugan with most of the Ki-Rin clan, it was the remaining people that formed the Fox clan. The Fox owe much of their existence to "spirit foxes" known as kitsune. This chapter shows us the special relationship that the Fox share with spirits of their home forest. A couple of new spells and the Kitsune Shugenja School complete the information needed to play a member of this peaceful clan. The female daimyo, Ryosei, is also detailed.

Chapter III: The Dragonfly

The Dragonfly Clan was born as a result of a complex love triangle between a female Phoenix-shugenja, an ambitious Lion bushi, and an older Dragon warrior. This Minor Clan resides at the foot of the Dragon Mountains and acts as emissaries between the mysterious Dragon and the rest of the Empire. Their position as spokesmen to one of the Major Clans infuriates others Clans, especially the mighty Lion. The chapter explains Dragonfly's aberrant philosophy, which sees change as a key to enlightenment. The Tonbo Shugenja School is detailed (with couple of new spells) as is

the young daimyo, Tonbo Toryu.

Chapter IV: The Sparrow

This modest clan lives in a barren land between the Crane and the Crab. They see poverty as an honorable thing. This chapter tells how, recently, the Sparrow have stepped for the first time to the scene of national politics by forming the Three Man Alliance with Fox and Wasp. The Suzume Bushi School is also one of the more inventive on seen in the *L5R*; it emphasizes on their legendary patience, and information they have gained through their awesome storytelling skills.

Chapter V: The Badger

This small clan protects the northern mountains of Rokugan against a possible barbarian invasion from the Burning Sands. They are a silent, stoic clan, which explains why most of the Rokugan has ignored them. This clan is first mentioned in the *L5R* main book's introductory adventure "The Ceremony of the Samurai," and has mostly been ignored by AEG until now. The "Who's Who" section depicts the current daimyo, Ichiro Chuga, and offers a nice continuation to the fate of the previous daimyo as seen in the aforementioned adventure. As for the new game mechanics, there is a new "Outcast" disadvantage and the Ichiro Bushi School.

Chapter VI: The Centipede

The Centipede is a clan of mostly female shugenjas. They worship the Sun Goddess, Amaterasu, and have a matriarchal power structure. They apparently live somewhere along the coast near the lands of Phoenix. (It would have been useful if AEG had included a map showing the location of each of the minor clans; according to the author Ree Soesbee, this will be addressed in the second edition of the main rules.) The Moshi Shugenja School is briefly detailed, and there are two new spells. Everyone's favorite shugenja from the CCG, Moshi Wakiza, makes an appearance.

Chapter VII: The Falcon

The Falcon are the all-but-forgotten clan that lives just west of the haunted Shinomen Forest. This area is very dangerous, and the Falcon have developed an uncanny ability to sense things around them. The clan's relations with the Crab, Lion and Hare are well presented. However, it is a pity that there is no mention about them getting partly conquered by the Crab, as was clearly stated in the *Winter Court: Kyuden Seppun*. The Falcon Bushi School seems to be among of the most powerful ones.

Chapter VIII: The Tortoise

Clan Tortoise is hardly a clan at all; they live on the coast near the capital and are charged with defending the Otosan Uchi against invasion from the sea. They dabble in trade and do some more questionable things as well. Since the Emperor himself is their daimyo, clan members get away with minor slights easier than others. The Tortoise Bushi School teaches the use of peasant weapons, among other things, and is not an honorable at all. Selected personalities from the clan are Hyobe and Kemmei. Clan Tortoise will no doubt become more useful after the upcoming Otosan Uchi boxed set.

Chapter IX: The Wasp

Story of the troubled birth of the Wasp Clan is maybe the most dramatic of the lot. Most of this chapter's information has been previously released in an old issue of the Imperial Herald; John Wick himself masterly wrote the old article. This new one lacks in feeling, but luckily contains more information about this clan of bounty hunters. The Wasp specializes in bows, and this shows in their Bushi School. The Man himself, Tsuruchi, is featured as well as his aide, Mukami.

Chapter X: The Lost Three

These are the clans that have somehow been destroyed in the past. The first one is the Boar that parted from the Crab centuries ago but was soon after destroyed for rebellion against the Empire. Some dark entity, known as Shakoki Dogu, roams in the lost Boar provinces. The Boar Bushi School was known for its use of the wavy-headed spear called Mai Chong.

The second lost Clan is the Hare. This chapter (written by Rich Wulf of "Rokugan 90210" fame) is doubly interesting, since the great battle that lead to the fall of the Hare was depicted in adventure that came with the old version of the *GM's Screen*. Unfortunately, this chapter doesn't give alternate adventure hooks if your group actually succeeded in saving the Hare. It gives some plausible ideas about the truth behind the Hare's demise, but in many groups GM's have long ago created their own continuations to this old (and out-of-print) adventure.

Clan Snake is the last of the three. It was once situated in the plains between the Dragon and the Phoenix, but after dabbling in the black arts it was utterly destroyed by the Phoenix. The Snake are perfect for making maho-using NPC shugenjas. At the end of this section are a couple of adventure hooks to introduce the PCs to the remnants of the Snake Clan.

Summary

Overall, this is a great book for GM's who plan to use the Minor Clans in their campaigns. It has tons of information, new Schools, skills, spells and much more. The artwork is not too bad, but it's not spectacular either. The only bad thing I can say about *Way of the Minor Clans* is that it should have been released earlier, since some plot hooks are only useful for really old adventures.

-- Kai Saarto

Dork Tower!

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

Murphy's Rules

?

Pyramid Pick

Simply Roleplaying!

Produced by MicroTactix Games

Written by Bob Portnell and Guy McLimore

132 pages*, $9.00

I've begun this review four times; this is attempt number five.

The problem is not: Is this a good product; it is.

The problem is, for *whom* is this a good product?

Simply Roleplaying! is the core RPG book of the PlainLabel Game System system, and is in the Adobe PDF electronic format. This book comprises the character creation rules, as well as GM information for creating and running adventures.

I must confess; at first, I was skeptical as to how worthwhile this product would be. I mean, with *FUDGE*, *GURPS*, *MasterBook*, and *Hero System* (among others), how many other generic systems do we *really* need? What hole does this product fill?

I'll get back to this is a bit.

Simply Roleplaying! is probably the most well-designed electronic-only game I've ever encountered. It comes with an on-screen version, which is 238 pages and optimized for reading on monitor, and a print version, which is 132 pages and seems designed for folks who can print it out from work. It also comes with an 18-page "pull out" section, which consists of the charts and graphs the game uses, and four pages of "weapon cards" from various genres, which is what *Simply Roleplaying!* uses for keeping track of weapon abilities and damage. It also comes with a file consisting of a high-quality color version of the cover used in the book. In my mind, if nothing else, *Simply Roleplaying!* has raised the bar considerably for future downloadable games; if a new PDF-format game *doesn't* give me a pull-out booklet of the useful charts and graphs, I'm going to be disappointed.

Simply Roleplaying!'s base system uses 2d10 added together, for a range of 2-20. In this game, you want to roll low to succeed, and high for damage. You have four attributes (Strength, Coordination, Intellect, and Health) rated between 2 and 10. Your skills add to these attributes, depending on your level of skill, of which there are four: Familiar adds +1, Capable adds +4, Professional adds +8, and Expert adds +12. Thus a person with a Coordination of 5 who is a Capable Climber is hoping to roll 9 or less on 2d10 on an average task. The system seems a bit harsh, as an average person (with an attribute of 5) and a Professional skill level will still fail about 28% of the time, according to the rulebook. But there are modifiers, depending on if the task is, say, Easy or Difficult (for example). You also have other attributes, like Luck which you can spend to modify rolls.

Character creation is a bit odd, in that it uses a random number of extra attribute points; each attribute starts at 3, and then you get to add 1d10+5 attribute points divided among the four stats. While some GMs may not like the unevenness, the game *does* make a valid argument that in life not everyone starts "even." For GMs truly uncomfortable with this, however, it should be trivial to assign a set number of points.

Characters can also have Abilities and Disabilities, which are special aspects that help or hinder them. They are rated on a scale of zero (trivial) to three (really bad or good); in the standard game, these must balance. Thus you might have

Acute Vision (level 1 Ability) and a Significant Limp (level 1 Disability). In more heroic games you may have more points in Abilities than Disabilities, and in truly gritty games you may be saddled with more points of Disabilities than Abilities. Although this section is simplistic for those used to *GURPS*'s seemingly-infinite Advantage and Disadvantage system, it *does* go a long way towards making sure your character has some flavor, while being very simple.

Skills are assigned according to age and Intellect. The skill system seems logical yet, again, simple; the descriptive skill levels mentioned above are applied to the skills you want. This is definitely useful for getting beginners to understand their characters; you can say you're an Expert Martial Artist, and that immediately evokes an image for a would-be player.

The rest of the player's section deals with equipment and money, and includes some examples of play to help a would-be player understand what roleplaying is like.

The GM's section, which encompasses about three-fifths of the book, is devoted to the rules a player wouldn't be as concerned with, like skill systems, poisons, animals, healing, etc. These parts, though brief, are well-done; the logical nature of the basic rules are followed throughout this section. The GM's section also contains a *lot* of basic advise for creating and maintaining worthwhile campaigns, including many examples of campaigns (a war story, a police drama, a science fantasy game, etc.) and logical ways to develop and build those campaigns. The examples provided are excellent, and are worthwhile reading for anyone who knows they want to GM, but doesn't have a lot of ideas for *how* you go about it.

It took a couple of re-readings to put my finger on it; this is one of the only RPGs that seems to, at its core, not want to exist. The book is heavily focussed on telling stories, and a good amount of the book is devoted to doing just that; designing adventures, making compelling scenarios, developing tones, textures and themes for campaigns, etc. In my mind, this is the part of the book that really shines. Many parts of the book give detailed systems for how to resolve situations (for example, poison), then tell the GM to ignore it if it's not important to the story. The approach takes some getting used to for folks (like myself) who've grown accustomed to the seemingly rules-heavy atmosphere of games like *GURPS*, but it's definitely worthwhile.

So who is this game designed for? That's a difficult question to answer. I can honestly say this game isn't recommendable for the system alone; the system, while entirely functional, isn't particularly fun. But perhaps that's part of the point; when is a roleplaying game system supposed to be more important than the act of roleplaying? The game doesn't offer any interesting worlds to explore; that's left up almost entirely to the GM, though anything from GURPS would be a fine place to take things from. No, at its heart I would recommend *Simply Roleplaying!* most for would-be or inexperienced GMs; it truly shines when it's offering concrete advice on how to design fun game sessions. As supplements come out (*Simply Superhuman* or *Simply Space*, for example) that expand the scope of the basic game, *Simply Roleplaying!* will probably appeal to a wider audience. But until then, an RPG that costs less than two issues of most paper magazines but provides ten times as much insight for the inexperienced GM is a definite winner in my book.

-- Steven Marsh

by Steven Marsh

In *In Nomine*, the Malakim are able to determine the most noble and ignoble deeds of people they come in contact with, as well as their greatest virtues and worst sins. Unfortunately, the existence of such an ability encourages its use, much to the dismay of the poor GM who has to come up with interesting virtues and sins on the spot. The *__Liber Servitorum__* has some sample virtues and vices, with the number of NPCs your average Malakim is liable to run across (and over), that list runs out quickly.

Here, then, is a table which allows for the quasi-creation of noble and ignoble deeds. Regrettably it uses the d6666 system; if you wanted to pare it down to d666, you can delete one of the columns ("Location" is a logical choice, but choose whichever one you're most comfortable with making up). Assign each die a column, and keep track of the results; then, using the results, weave those elements into a virtue or vice.

Virtue/Vice	Person affected (if appropriate)	Location (if appropriate)	Intensity (if appropriate)
Virtue 1. Honesty 2. Compassion 3. Determination 4. Justice 5. Sacrifice 6. Courage **Vice** 1. Deceit 2. Cruelty 3. Sloth 4. Injustice (animosity) 5. Want (greed, gluttony, lust)	The lower the roll, the closer the person affected is to the person. For example, 1. family (or self, if appropriate) 2. family 3. friend 4. acquaintance 5. stranger 6. enemy	The lower the roll, the closer the location is to the person. For example, 1. home (or self, if appropriate) 2. home 3. work 4. neighborhood 5. state 6. nation (or greater)	The lower the roll, the less intense the virtue/vice. For example, 1. trivial 2. minor 3. significant 4. memorable 5. major 6. monumental

6. Cowardice			

Example Rolls

Virtues

- **4, 3, 3, 2: Justice / Friend / Work / Minor.** Standing up for a co-worker accused of doing an ineffective job, despite the jeopardy it may place your own job in.
- **5, 1, 5, 4: Sacrifice / Family (or Self) / State / Memorable.** Confessing for vandalism you didn't do to protect your brother.
- **6, 6, 2, 5: Courage / Enemy / Home / Major.** Giving first aid to the burglar you just shot as he broke into your home, despite the danger it places you in.

Vices

- **5, 2, 4, 3: Want / Family / Neighborhood / Significant.** Taking a piece of jewelry belonging to your mother from your sister's apartment.
- **1, 5, 6, 1: Deceit / Stranger / Nation / Trivial.** Cheating on your taxes by claiming your dog as a dependant.
- **2, 4, 1, 6: Cruelty / Acquaintance / Home (or Self) / Monumental.** Beating your neighbor to death because his music bothers you.

Things to Remember

- Keep in mind that the entire purpose of this table is to give you ideas; you may wish to delete columns that don't make sense for a particular roll, or re-roll entirely if you don't get an idea from a particular roll.
- Although this table can be useful in determining the motivations of random NPCs, you may want to give some thought to what the vices and virtues of major characters are.
- Consider that the magnitude of the table probably changes depending on the Malakim's result; for example, the most noble or ignoble thing a person has done in the past week is likely to be less significant than the most noble or ignoble thing a person has done in the past year. A "memorable" cowardly moment of the past week is probably not as significant as a "memorable" cowardly moment in the past year.
- Likewise remember that a major sin to a priest may not be as significant as a major sin to a serial killer. Use your judgement.
- The virtues and vices roughly parallel; honesty opposes deceit, compassion opposes cruelty, etc.
- If the Malakim scores a 5 or 6 on the check die, you may wish to consider adding pride and humility to the possibilities in the first column. (Remember that 1-4 on the resonance check die are from the person's own standards; most people don't consider their humility to be their greatest virtue, nor do most prideful people recognize that to be their greatest vice.)

This chart should also be useful in any other systems that require the generation of instant motivation, like *Vampire: The Dark Age*'s Daimoinon or Auspex, *Fading Suns*'s Psi and Theurgy powers, or *Mage* or *GURPS Psionics* abilities.

* * *

This chart was inspired and influenced by the Ultima *series of computer games.*

by Ricky Hunt

In a world where magic is available, it is only a matter of time before someone other than mages learns to use it. This article gives some guidelines on how non-mages can enchant magical items.

The process involves creating an item and incorporating inherently magical ingredients according to a specific recipe. The magic items are somewhat more restricted than those created by a mage, but may be a little cheaper and faster. The biggest difficulty is obtaining the proper ingredients, which can be an adventure in itself as they are expensive and dangerous to acquire.

The first skill needed is a craft of some sort, to create the item that will be made magical. Armoury is needed to create magical armor, weaving is needed for magical cloth, etc. The second skill needed is Enchanting (M/VH, no default) which teaches the basics on how to incorporate magical elements to create magical items.

The last component is the "spell" recipe appropriate to the enchantment. For a tougher suit of armor, a Fortify recipe is needed. This could be a separate skill for each type of enchantment, similar to normal enchanting, but not a spell. Another option would be that each type of "spell" is an actual recipe, written down and followed from the writings by someone with the Enchanting skill. Obviously, literacy would be needed for the second option. The recipe could be a closely guarded secret or widely available, depending on the campaign.

The next ingredient is enough magical elements to make the item. This is based on the cost to normally enchant the item from *GURPS Magic*. Each ingredient has a certain amount of mana per ounce that can be incorporated into the item. For instance, mithril might have 20 mana per ounce and therefore require 2.5 oz for fortify 1 (50 ST) and 10 for fortify 2 (200 ST). All of the ingredients are of course rare and expensive. The item is not necessarily made from the ingredients, but they must be irreversibly bound into the item. A failure ruins the materials.

Possible ingredients include mithril, orichalcum, elemental air, earth, fire and water, rare magical wood or mana organs from creatures. Another possibility might be to allow mages to enchant mana "dust" that could be used in the enchantment. A mana pool could be used to help enchant an item. This would normally require some means of capturing the mana for use by a non-mage. Specially designed craft devices could capture the mana into a usable form. For instance, a special loom could weave the mana into magical threads to use in magical clothing.

The process would start with gathering the ingredients. Depending on what was being enchanted, the item would then have to be fashioned for 8 hours per day incorporating x oz of the element per day for as long as it takes. Unlike mage enchantments, the process could be interrupted at some stages without incident. Normally the Enchantment skill roll is attempted as the magical elements are combined, then the craft roll is made to incorporate the elements. Failure of either destroys the item and ruins the elements. It is faster than normal enchantment, but requires more money and danger up front, as most of the elements are dangerous to gather. Most are near strong sources of mana, which tend to attract unwanted attention.

These enchanters would not be as rare as mage enchanters or as strange and quirky. They would be practicing their normal craft with some extra challenge and reward built in. They would be limited to what they could build into the item. They could not normally create mage only items. This would take some burden off of normal enchanters so they could concentrate on the more demanding enchantments. They would also have to decide how the item was going to be enchanted before they started, because the enchantment is an integral part of the creation of the item. Any further enchantment would have to be performed by a mage. Also, the enchantments are limited to effects that cost no ST to cast or maintain, either normally or by the use of the power enchantment.

Possible recipes for items would be:

- **Fortify armor 1:** This would require 2.5 oz of mithril to be alloyed with the steel for the armor as the plates are being forged. It would be incorporated into the steel at 0.5 oz per day, taking five days to make the alloy. Once created, they would be fashioned into armor, taking 1.5 times longer than normal armor.
- **Lighten armor:** This would require 2 oz of elemental air (25 ST / oz) to be alloyed with 2 oz of orichalcum, then alloyed with the steel in the armor. The process requires extra equipment to handle the elemental air, which would cost another $100. The alloy process takes 4 days and can be dangerous on an Enchant skill failure. The armor is fashioned as normal. Leather armor has the alloy incorporated into the fasteners and the enchantment is destroyed if they are removed.
- **Puissance 1:** 10 oz of elemental earth is alloyed with the metal at a rate of 0.5 oz per day before it is forged into the blade. The blade takes 1.5 times longer to create due to the hardness of the alloy.
- **Power:** a mana organ from some powerful creature capable of producing enough mana to self power the item is "distilled" down and incorporated into the item somehow, depending on the craft used and the item created. This would be different for each recipe.
- **Powerstone:** An unusual gem must be set in jewelry made from orichalcum, which must surround the gem in a filigree. Usually surrounded by a more protective setting as they can be rather fragile in their native form.

by Nick LaLone

Jonathan Tweet is the lead designer of the upcoming *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*, and the creator of many cult-favorite RPGs like *Over the Edge*. He took a few moments recently to let us know what's going on with him, and to let us know about the progress of the upcoming Next Big Thing from Wizards of the Coast.

* * *

Pyramid: First off, an introduction, tell us your name and what you have done in this industry.

Tweet: I'm Jonathan Tweet, and my games include *Ars Magica*, an RPG about medieval wizards (co-authored with Mark Rein*Hagen); *Over the Edge*, a modern-day, surreal RPG with free-form mechanics (with Robin D. Laws); *Everway*, a fantasy RPG that runs on images instead of numbers; and *On the Edge*, a TCG based on *Over the Edge* (co-authored with John Nephew). I've worked on other people's games, too, including *AD&D*, *Talislanta*, and *RuneQuest*.

Wizards of the Coast has an extensive website. It details a lot of their games and even has a few free ones for download. You can view the website here (www.wizards.com).

Pyramid: How did you come to be involved with Wizards of the Coast?

Tweet: A friend and associate from my *Ars Magica* days got hooked up with Wizards, and she contacted me back in 1989 to do some free lance work for them. That's how I got to work on *Talislanta*. When *Magic: the Gathering* hit, the folks at Wizards no longer had time to handle their RPGs, so they hired me to run the RPG lines. Those lines got cut in '95, and I switched over to doing TCG work. Then we bought TSR, and I wound up doing RPGs again.

Atlas Games now produce *Ars Magica*. If you would like more information you can go to Atlas' website (http://www.atlas-games.com/)

Pyramid: How did you feel about Hasbro and Wizards of the Coast merging?

Tweet: It's not a merger; it's a purchase. But anyway, I feel great about it. Wizards hasn't changed any as near as I can tell, except that now we have access to some exciting toy and game lines.

Pyramid: Did Wizards of the Coast ask you personally, to head the **Dungeons and Dragons: Third Edition** *team?*

Tweet: Peter Adkison, the president, asked me to be the lead designer. At that time, I was already a member of the design team, which includes Monte Cook and Skip Williams, two game designers with a lot on the ball. Peter wanted there to be a single lead designer to avoid designing the game by committee, but it's really been a team effort all along.

There is a FAQ for *Dungeons and Dragons Third Edition*. This FAQ can be found here. (http://www.wizards.com/3e/faq.asp)

Pyramid: How much has Gary Gygax lent toward the completion of **Third Edition***?*

Tweet: Of course, it's all based on what he and Dave Arneson did when they originally wrote *Dungeons & Dragons*, but neither of them has had a direct role in developing the new edition. Still, I keep the original version of *D&D* within arm's reach of my computer, and I occasionally refer to it when I want to get back to basics and see where all these ideas came from.

Pyramid: What are you hoping to accomplish with the **Third Edition of Dungeons and Dragons***? What is your dream for this project?*

Tweet: Our goal has been to make the game substantially better. At first, my judgment was that we should just edit *2nd Edition* to clean up its most obvious problems, but Peter rightly pointed out that if we're going to change the game, we might as well make it worthwhile for people to learn the new rules. In other words, we should take the opportunity to make it much, much better, even if that means changing it from cover to cover.

My dream is to have a game system that supports the high-energy campaigns that I saw the college kids playing back when I was in junior high and that has the realism, flexibility, and efficiency that I expect out of RPG rules. I'm happy to say that we're there.

Pyramid: Are you looking forward to the Dungeons and Dragons *movie?*

Tweet: Completely. I'm not a big movie-goer, but I sure want to see what they've made of the game.

Pyramid: Will it help the way the world looks at role-playing?

Tweet: I don't think it will help nearly as much as all the computer RPGs are already helping. Playing a character in a fantasy setting has gone mainstream, thanks to computer games.

Pyramid: How has the feedback from the playtesters been? Are they excited to see what you have done?

Tweet: I hate to admit it, but I was surprised at how much the playtesters like the game. I had thought that the most serious *AD&D* players would be too invested in the rules to judge the new edition on its merits and instead would just hate anything new and different. Instead, we found out that the playtesters like good rules, even if it means they have to do some relearning. In fact, most of them had lists of things they wanted to see changed themselves.

Near the end of the major playtesting push, we ran a survey of the playtesters, and the few things that they generally didn't like, we changed. Personally, I think that 1d4+1 damage for magic missile, no saving throw, no attack roll, is stupid. We changed it, but the playtesters objected, and we changed it back. (And I do it my way in my campaign.)

Playtester Spotlights can be found here. (http://www.wizards.com/3e/3E_Playtest_Group_mar00.asp)

Pyramid: Have you received any angry letters from rabid **First Edition** *fans who do not want to see* **Dungeons and Dragons** *redesigned yet again?*

Tweet: Sure, but we get even more letters from people telling us how to change the game than from people telling us not to change the game.

Pyramid: I have noticed a lot of new, beautiful art for the **Third Edition** *of* **Dungeons and Dragons***. Why redesign that aspect of the game?*

Tweet: If I can speak for the people who directed that aspect of the game, it's to give *D&D* a visual identity all its own. Plus, if you can draw a cooler Displacer Beast, why not do it?

The new art for ***Dungeons and Dragons Third Edition*** is beautiful. It can be found at this address:
http://www.wizards.com/3e/3E_art.asp

*Pyramid: There are many debates held over the Alignment rules of **Dungeons and Dragons**. They span from; it should not be in there, to you must live by your alignment and never stray. How have you fixed this?*

Tweet: Elegantly.

Seriously, specific rules questions are outside the scope of an interview at this time.

Pyramid: I have read in Dragon Magazine*, as well as a few articles in various magazines that Greyhawk is going to be the base world for all of **Dungeons and Dragons**. Will this not affect the feel of the game for those who wish to play in other worlds?*

Tweet: The Greyhawk elements in the core rules are so light that they won't interfere with DMs running their campaigns in other worlds. Rules such as which races are present or what the equipment lists looks like define the world much more strongly than whether we call the setting "Greyhawk" or "Faldoozia," and demographics and equipment have always been part of the game.

*Pyramid: Will every TSR (now Wizards of the Coast/Hasbro) world be redesigned with **Dungeons and Dragons Third Edition** rules? I am looking forward to **Planescape** if the answer is yes.*

Tweet: I don't know which worlds will be redone and which won't. Personally, I'd like to drive a stake through the heart of **Dark Sun** before it can rise again, but **Dark Sun** fans can rest assured that it's not up to me one way or the other.

Pyramid: Will you be aiding in the redesign of those worlds? If not, what's next for Jonathan Tweet?

Tweet: I don't have long-term plans, other than to stay involved with **D&D**. I'm also coordinating some of Wizards' beginner game efforts. There's a major emphasis at Wizards on developing our ability to make our games easy to learn for the first-time hobby gamer. After all, the more first-time hobby gamers there are, the better off the whole hobby industry is.

Pyramid: Every game you have done has had some sort of odd inspiration, in a good way of course. How do you get inspired?

Tweet: As much as I'd like to give some flip answer, I don't have any one source of inspiration. I've played a lot of RPGs, and that helps. For instance, the "Houses" of wizards in **Ars Magica** are a pretty direct steal from Greg Stafford's **RuneQuest**, where religions served the same purpose: grounding a character in a social and political milieu. On the other hand, the great power wielded by wizards in **Ars Magica** is partly a contrary reaction to Greg Costikyan's **DragonQuest**, in which a lowly peasant has at least a 25% chance to resist the strongest spell from the mightiest wizard.

The other thing that's helped me is to have a driving vision or goal for a project. With **Ars Magica**, the goal was to do wizards and magic right. For **Over the Edge**, I wanted and anything-goes RPG that I could play with my friends and that would be painless for me to teach. For **Everway**, I wanted something that would appeal to the visual imagination.

*Pyramid: What sort of music would you describe **Dungeons and Dragons** to feel like?*

Tweet: My campaign is about religious and ethnic passion, big action, and strange creatures with strange beliefs. Its soundtrack would be Indian instrumentals, with pounding orchestrals for the fight scenes. But it's the role of **D&D** to conform to each DM's vision, so no one sort of music fits it.

*Pyramid: Will **Everway** ever find its way into a new release list again?*

Tweet: It's currently published and supported by Rubicon Games here in Seattle. And if I ever get a chance to try an image-based game again, well, let's just say I haven't learned my lesson yet.

Rubicon Games has a lot of adventures and translations for the Everway Game. If you want more information go to their website. (http://www.rubicongames.com/)

Pyramid: *You have been in this industry quite a while, what are your predictions for the next five to ten years?*

Tweet: I don't think that roleplaying a character around a table with a bunch of friends will ever be a default pastime, but roleplaying is already a lot less weird than it used to be. Computer RPGs have made RPG concepts common. Combining Hasbro's position in the market with Wizards' game resources should mean a big increase in the hobby game field.

And there's a fair chance that Ryan Dancy's open source gaming concept will lead to a boom in RPG publishing.

The open Gaming Foundation is a new and interesting twist to RPG design. If you would like to learn more, or perhaps download the rules themselves, go here: http://www.opengamingfoundation.org

Pyramid: *Almost every gamer I have met has a project they are working on. Do you have any advice for these designers? How does one break into the gaming industry persay?*

Tweet: Don't start a company to publish your variant of *D&D*, *GURPS*, or *Vampire*. Do go to GenCon to see what's being published. Pay special attention to start-up companies whose people can't tell you in one sentence what's cool about their new variant of *D&D*/*GURPS*/*Vampire*. Don't be like them. Do go to college and learn how to write well. Don't write a huge RPG on spec and send it out to publishers hoping that they'll set aside the games they're already working on to make room in their schedules for your magnum opus. Do get writer's guidelines from magazines and try your hand and submitting professionally polished articles or adventures. Don't send letters to game companies telling them that you've got a great game but won't show it to them because you're afraid they'll steal it. Do learn to use a computer and hook up to the Internet.

Pyramid: *Do you have any final thoughts to add before the interview ends?*

Tweet: Nope. All out of thoughts.

Robo Chess

by Ken Cooney and Joshua Marquart

Art by Ken Cooney, Phil Foglio, Joshua Marquart and ArtToday

Robo Chess

"I hate this game." Deep-B scanned the factory and noted the scrubbots, furiously scraping up the spilled oil from the fallen Twonky nearby. "When will I ever learn," B mused, "If only we still played chess. Back in my day, I was the king of chess." Checking the mail, Deep-B took note of an incoming message from Friend-C. It read as the usual dreaded proposal:

"Shall we play a game?"

Deep-B grudgingly sent back a confirmation, but pulsed its processors in frustration. "Ever since the clones died, existence is simply boring. There is nothing else to do except play games, but all anyone ever wants to play is *Robo Rally*." An alert noting the receipt of a list of choices brought the super-computer out of its reminiscence. Dropping down and reading the list of games, Deep-B polished off a response: "Tic-Tac-Toe? Been there. Global-thermonuclear war? Done that. *Robo Rally*? The scrubbots aren't finished cleaning. How about a nice game of chess?"

In came the response from Friend-C. "No, you're too good. I want to play *Robo Rally*. We will wait for the factory's cleansing."

"Are you sure you don't want to play che. . ." Deep-B's response trailed off as its mother AI program spawned a new thread. "I just formulated an idea. How about a compromise?" Even before waiting for a response, Deep-B sent alerts to the weldbots requesting the affixation of a large crane to the arena ceiling and began dredging out the long discarded chessbots.

"What do you have in mind? I'm listening."

Approximately 20 minutes later, the rally robots quaked in terror as they realized their fears. They had truly become pawns.

* * *

Object of the Game

Exactly like a standard chess game: capture the opponent's King by checkmate to win or force a stalemate to tie. Of course, the addition of *Robo Rally* robots, a programmable giant crane and appended board pieces makes for a much

more exciting challenge.

Number of Players: 2

Requirements

- 1 set of *Robo Rally* and optional expansions: "Crash and Burn" and "Armed and Dangerous".
- 1 set of chess pieces small enough to fit on the *Robo Rally* squares.
- Stiff paper.
- Small notepads and pencils.

Preparations

Print out the graphics provided with this article and glue them to stiff paper. If a printer is unavailable, design the 2x8 square chess sections yourself.

Game Setup

Robo Chess

Choose one *Robo Rally* factory board. We recommend the Island. Slip the 2 paper pieces, known as the "Quasi-Magnetic" sections, under either end of the board extending it into an "almost rectangle" of 8x2, 12x12, 8x2 (see diagram). Each square on the board is 1 inch. Place the chess pieces on their appropriate sections on the Quasi-Magnetic section, just like in standard chess. Each player must choose a robot and place its equivalent virtual bot under his King position on the quasi-magnetic board.

How to Play

Turns run like any standard *Robo Rally* game, with the addition of a few new rules and objectives. First and foremost, this is chess and there are no flags. Your robot is working for your team: moving pieces, shooting other robots and pieces, and generally defending the king, all in an effort to checkmate the opponent's king. The second biggest change is the giant crane added to the factory, used to pick up chess pieces and drop them onto the board in simulation of standard chess moves. Each player receives 10 Program Cards per turn (see "Programming the Crane").

The Robots

Robots move as normal each register phase. If the virtual bot is still underneath a chess piece, it must remain a virtual bot until it is no longer under a piece. Robots may push a single chess piece in any direction as if the piece was another robot. Robots may not push two or more chess pieces in a row, nor may a robot push any piece on either quasi-magnetic board. The crane (see below) may be programmed to pick up the player's robot, even if it is powered down, and move it as if it were a king, 1 space in any direction including diagonally. Only in this manner may a robot capture chess pieces. If dropped on another robot, the target robot is destroyed. Each time a robot is dropped by the crane, it receives 2 points of damage. Even though there are 10 Program Cards, Robots still lock registers after the fourth point of damage. Robots have five archive copies; each of which restarts as a virtual bot from whatever space the king is currently on.

The Chess Pieces

Chess pieces are moved around the board by the crane. If a chess piece is dropped onto an opposing piece during that player's move, the opposing piece is captured. If dropped on a robot of either side, the robot is destroyed by the weight of the piece. A chess piece can capture a friendly piece if moved by the crane during the opposing player's move (see "Moving the Crane" below). A chess piece can be destroyed by environmental and tactical damage. If a chess piece takes more total damage in one register phase than its game worth (see below), it is destroyed and removed from play entirely. Pawns are promoted when they reach the end section on the opposing player's quasi-magnetic board. If a player's king is destroyed due to his own actions, he loses the game, and if he destroys the opposing king, the game is stalemate.

Piece	Worth
Pawn, King	2
Bishop, Knight	4
Rook	8
Queen	16

Programming the Crane

Instead of 9 Program Cards per turn, each player receives 10 Program Cards. If a player's robot has died and there are no more archive copies, or the player's robot is powered down, the player only receives one new Program Card per turn. The extra card is provided in order to program the crane, which will pick up a chess piece or robot and place it down on the board appropriately. To program the crane, write the desired chess move (consisting of current coordinates, chess piece, and target coordinates) on a piece of paper. The move must be a valid chess move based on how the board is presented right before the first register phase of the turn. The chess move may only be made with any of the player's own pieces or robot. Select a Program Card and place it, along with the paper, next to the robot's fifth programmed register phase. This is the "Crane Card", and its Card Priority should be hidden from the other player. The Crane Card is not considered a register and will never lock when the robot takes damage.

Example: Bill's Knight is on E5, threatened by Dave's Bishop on C3. Bill decides to move his Knight to G6, a currently empty space. To move the Knight, Bill writes down "E5 Knight to G6", chooses one of his unused Program Cards for this phase, and places them in front of him next to his fifth programmed register. Dave attempts to capture the Knight, writing down "C3 Bishop to E5", choosing an unused Program Card, and placing them in front of him appropriately. Even though he anticipates Bill will move the Knight, Dave could not write down "C3 Bishop to F6", one space beyond the Knight, because it would be considered an illegal chess move at this time.

Robo Chess

Moving the Crane

The "Crane Moves" on the fifth register phase of every turn, after the "Robots Move" and before the "Board Elements Move" sequences. The crane is played as though it is "dumb". It does not know the chess game is being played on a factory floor and only checks the validity of moves as it is programmed (before the first register phase) and assumes the program is still valid when it does move (during the fifth register phase). No matter what happens to change the board around, including changes due to it's own actions, the crane will execute the move listed on each player's piece of paper based on the associated Crane Card's Priority Number. The higher Priority Number Card will move the crane first. The Crane can pick up pieces and robots, but will never touch a virtual bot. The crane does not discriminate and will pick up any piece or robot in the space it has been ordered to pick up from, but if there is nothing in the pickup space, nothing is moved.

All non-jumping chess pieces are moved from one point to another by being dropped on each intervening space until either the destination space is reached, the move is blocked by a friendly piece, the piece is inadvertently "lost" (by being dropped into a pit or portal), or an enemy piece is captured. Jumping pieces (Knights) are moved directly from their point of departure to their point of destination and do not contact intervening spaces.

Because the robot or board elements may have moved pieces during the previous register phases, it is possible to capture a different piece than originally intended, even on a section of the board prior to the original destination. In fact, the moving piece might not even be the original piece intended for the move. Any piece, friendly or not, picked up by the crane during a player's programmed crane movement is treated as though it was that player's piece, and in this manner, it is possible for a friendly piece to capture another friendly piece.

If a moving piece captures an opposing piece before it reaches its destination, it ceases moving. If the move is blocked by a friendly piece, the moving piece is placed onto the last space it left and the friendly piece is left untouched. In the case of jumping pieces, the last space they left is the space they began at, but all other pieces are placed on the last space the crane dropped them on.

Friendly and opposing robots are destroyed by dropped pieces from either player. Unlike inadvertently capturing an opposing piece on the incorrect coordinates, if a robot is crushed and the chess piece has not yet reached it's destination, the crane picks up the chess piece and continues moving it.

Example 1: Bill's Crane Card has a Priority of 340. Dave's Crane Card lists 460. The crane performs the move listed on Dave's paper first and picks up the Bishop at C3. Because a Bishop does not jump, the Bishop is dropped onto the empty space D4, picked up again, then placed in space E5, capturing Bill's Knight. The crane now executes Bill's move. Believing it to be Bill's Knight, a jumping piece, the crane picks up Dave's Bishop at E5 and moves it directly to G6. Unfortunately for Dave, during the previous register phases the conveyor belts moved one of Dave's Pawns to space G6. Even though both pieces are Dave's, Bill captures the Pawn, since the crane believes the Bishop to be Bill's Knight. If the Pawn on G6 had been Bill's Pawn, the crane would believe it was a friendly and place the Bishop back onto the last space it landed on, E5.

Example 2: On the next register phase 1, Bill's Rook is on E10. In an attempt to capture Dave's Bishop on E5, Bill writes down "E10 Rook to E5" and chooses a Priority 900 card. Dave's Queen is on F1 with a clear path to F6. He writes down "F1 Queen to F6" and chooses a Priority 240 card. By the time the "Crane Moves" sequence comes around on the fifth register phase, the conveyor belts have moved one of Dave's Pawns to E8, a space between Bill's Rook and Dave's Bishop, and Bill's robot has ended its movement on F4. When the crane moves Bill's Rook, the Rook drops on space E9, then onto Dave's Pawn at E8, capturing it. Because an opposing piece has been captured, the crane ceases moving Bill's Rook, leaving it on E8. Dave points at Bill and laughs as the crane moves his Queen from F1 to F2 to F3 to F4, crushing Bill's robot, to F5 to F6.

The Board Elements

The outside borders of the entire factory and attached chessboards are considered to be walls. Conveyors leading off the "edge" of the board move directly into walls. During the "Board Elements Move" sequence of each register phase, but not during crane movement (except for pits and drains), chess pieces are affected by any appropriate board elements. Conveyor belts, flowing water, and pushers move pieces as if they were robots (see page 34 of *Robo Rally* Operating Manual), but gears do nothing. Capturing is only performed through crane movement, so opposing chess pieces pushed into each other do not capture. Pieces cannot be pushed through walls and walls do not affect piece movement, as cranes simply carry the pieces over the walls. Because of this, factory walls are no defense against capture and should not be

factored in when determining a move, except when
considering tactical, robot-interactive reasons.

A chess piece which receives more total damage in one
register phase than its worth is destroyed (not captured, but
considered "dead" by *Knightmare Chess* standards), and is
permanently removed from play. Lasers, Radiation, and
Flamers damage chess pieces. Chess pieces cannot be mutated.
Activated crushers destroy chess pieces, and any piece pushed
or moved into, or dropped onto a pit, open trap door, or drain will be destroyed, including during crane movement.
Ramps have no effect on movement, and a chess piece pushed off a ledge lands undamaged, cannot be pushed onto
another piece, and crushes any robot is falls on. A chess piece pushed (not dropped) onto an Oil Slick slides as though
it were a robot moving onto the slick. Pieces pushed (not dropped) into a repulsor are repulsed. A piece dropped onto a
Portal at any time immediately moves to the other portal of the same color and does not continue moving from the
destination Portal. If any friendly or opposing piece or robot already occupies the destination Portal, the moving piece
does not go through, and if during a crane movement, may continue as normal. Only robots may access Repair Sites,
Chop Shops, and Randomizers. Double wrench repair sites may be used as normal for either option cards, to repair a
robot, or to recover one captured chess piece per turn. Recovered chess pieces are returned to any legal starting
position on the player's quasi-magnetic board. If no legal starting position is available, the piece cannot return and
remains captured. It is up to pre-game decision as to whether chop shops, randomizers, and single-wrench spaces work
the same way.

Options

Robots receive options as normal. Chess pieces cannot have options. Pieces may be damaged by options including (but
not limited to) Missile Launchers, Big Ones, Buzz Bombs, Self-Destruct, Drones, and Ramming Gear. Chess pieces
set off Proximity Mines from 1 square distance and may be dropped on regular Mines. The Crane may not pick up any
piece it drops into Goo until the next "Crane Moves" sequence. If an Option (such as a Drone, Mini Howitzer, Tractor
or Pressor Beam) moves a target, a chess piece, unless destroyed, is affected accordingly. Bridges will effectively
cover any pit.

A Program Card placed on a Conditional may be used to replace the Crane Card, and a Program Card stored on a
Flywheel may be used as a Crane Card in subsequent turns. The Abort Switch will randomize the Crane Card and the
Scrambler may be used on the fifth register phase to scramble the opposing Crane Card. Dual Processor may be used
to place two cards down in place of a single Crane Card. With Extra Memory, a player receives 11 Program Cards per
turn (2 when powered down), but his robot is still destroyed when it receives 9 points of damage. If the player has lost
his robot and all archive copies, he may not have any options.

Check Conditions

Robots and board elements can accidentally (or deliberately) place any king into or out of check. Due to the nature of the movement, the player must actually checkmate the enemy King to win. The act of checkmating, capturing the opposing king with a friendly piece must be followed through. If a King is in check on the first register phase, the checked player must program the crane to bring his King out of check. Board elements including walls, pits, trap doors, portals, and conveyor belts should not be taken into consideration when determining a check situation. Robots are threatening pieces, which move like Kings, and should be considered as such. The crane determines a win situation, and it believes it is playing chess, albeit with strange moves, an extra piece that moves like a king, and an abnormally large chessboard, not on a factory floor.

For example: If moving a rook across the board to block a checkmate is the only feasible solution to the check situation, then it must be performed... even if the rook will fall into a pit when the crane drops it onto the next space over.

Winning

If there is a checkmate situation, the game is over and the appropriate player wins. If a player kills his own king, he loses. If a player kills the opposing king, the game is a stalemate. If both kings are checkmated on the same turn, the game is a stalemate. Due to the nature of the factory floor, it is entirely possible for one King to checkmate the other King.

Robo Chess Variations

The following variations can enhance a Robo Chess session.

1. **Factory Check**

   Pits, walls, and portals are now viable board elements to be considered during a Check situation, except for Knights who may jump over them. Pits covered with bridges are no longer considered pits.

2. **Abyss**

   The outside edge of the board is no longer surrounded by a wall, but is an abyss. Any piece entering the abyss is destroyed. Alternately, all inner factory walls may be ignored and moved through as if they weren't there at all.

3. **Pawn Turning**

   If it is possible to differentiate a "front" for all the Pawns, gears and turning conveyor belts may change their directions.

4. **Chess Options**

   Because a crane lifts the chess pieces, options are basically useless and only end up complicating game play, though it is conceivable for a chess piece to be affected by a movement card. Crab Legs, Reverse Gears, or Fourth Gear are quite applicable to Pawns.

5. **Team Play / Multiple Robots**

   This requires even teams of 2 or more, though one player may use multiple robots. Each player has his own robot to program separately, and may place his own Crane Card. Players on teams should consult their moves

beforehand. As normal, Crane Cards set off based on Priority. With 4-player chess rules, it could be possible to play a very large game of Robo Chess with four quasi-magnetic boards, and with 8 robots, that still leaves 2 players for a team.

6. **Non-King Robot**

The robot may begin on any space on the quasi-magnetic board, and acquires the properties of the chess piece on the space it starts on when moved by the crane. A destroyed Robot restarts where the piece it emulates is. If the piece is captured, the robot begins on the appropriate starting point at the quasi-magnetic board. Optionally, robots begin as non-virtual, completely taking the place of the piece whose space it starts on.

7. **Large Factory**

Feel free to extend the board by adding additional boards.

8. **Nigh-Invulnerable King**

Change the worth of the King to 64. Only the Big One, a lot of weaponry at once, or a pit can destroy a king.

9. **Mutation**

Chess pieces can mutate into other chess pieces when affected by radioactive mutation. The King is unaffected. Choose a mutation by selecting randomly from all friendly captured pieces. Optionally, use both friendly and opposing captured pieces.

10. **Speed Robo Chess**

In Speed Robo Chess, the crane is not pre-programmed every turn, but moves every phase based on the priority of the Player's phase card. Players receive 9 cards per turn as though it were a normal ***Robo Rally*** game, and the crane moves once for each player, each phase, based on the programmed movement card's priority, higher priority first. In Speed Robo Chess, if a robot's register is locked, that phase's priority stays the same when determining who moves the crane. Before starting play, Players should decide whether a checkmate condition is scanned for at the end of each phase or at the end of the turn (a bit more challenging).

11. **Knightmare Robo Chess**

Deep-B relaxed its processes in bliss. Finally, it had won a game of **Robo Rally**. *But as it began "juicing the capacitors" in celebration, Deep-B was interrupted by a constant ping of messaging. "I turned off all communications," it thought, reflecting back to its earlier request for privacy. Unable to cope with the nagging ping, Deep-B opened the message, entitled simply, "A Variation," from Illuminati-O.*

Add the ***Knightmare Chess I*** or ***II*** cards to the game. Either play with the standard 150 points of cards or each player receives 5 random cards and draws a new card upon each discard. Dead pieces may not be brought back through use of a repair site. Robots are treated as Kings. Keep close track of the state of the board during the first register phase, as some of the Knightmare Chess cards require a change of move. Moves are always based on the first register phase. Corners are considered to be the corners of the quasi-magnetic boards. "Knightmare!" "Think Again!" "Chaos" and probably "Panic" cards should be removed from the deck. In addition to its normal effect, "Hand to Hand" creates walls along the edges of the board. All other cards should play as normal, though there may be timing issues to be worked out.

Worlds In Collusion

"[S]cientists . . . continue building nuclear power plants and detonating nuclear devices, creating greater surface instability in the crust of this planet as we inexorably move closer to 5 May 2000 -- an anciently dreaded date embodied in the Great Pyramid's mathematical symbolism."
-- Richard Noone, *5/5/2000: Ice: The Ultimate Disaster*

Today, May 5, 2000, is quite the bisociative day. Either the world is ending (yet again), knocked icecap over fantail by the pole-shifting astrological-gravitational-orgone forces of the Sun, the Moon, and the other five classical planets lined up in a (relatively) small area (25 degrees, 53 minutes) of "geocentric" arc, or you're reading this column. On the off chance that the latter is the case, we'll squint along this planetary alignment (and given its threatening demeanor, I think we'd be justified in calling it a chaotic evil planetary alignment) and see if we can salvage some good gameable madness from the end of the world, again.

"I stated that pole shifts are not caused by planetary alignments, but because of some of the very issues in this article our planet is ripe for another shift. The May 5 alignment may trigger one."
-- Richard Noone, "Are We Approaching The Abyss?"

The most famous prophet foretelling cosmological doom for 5/5/2000 is Richard Noone, whose 1982 screed *5/5/2000: Ice: The Ultimate Disaster* is interesting not only for its spaniel-like habit of following any scent trail imaginable wherever it leads, but for only actually mentioning the planetary alignment in question about six times in its 358 pages. Through Noone's interpretation of two other pyramidologists' interpretations of the Victorian pyramid enthusiast Robert Menzies, we learn that there are precisely 6000 "pyramid inches" from the beginning of the Grand Gallery in the Great Pyramid of Cheops to the King's Chamber; at the rate of one inch per year, the Biblical "six days of creation" (meaning six millennia of history) are vindicated. Casting about for something to end the world in 2000 A.D., Noone fixated on the planetary alignment first predicted in 1961 by the Belgian astronomer Jan Meeus. Noone then 'postdicts' a terrible disaster in 4000 B.C. primarily through inventive Velikovskianism, implying that every six thousand years the poles shift thanks to the deadly effects of planetary alignment. (Sadly, the closest planetary alignment falls in December of 4019 B.C.) Along the way, Noone also argues that the Great Pyramid must have been built in 4000 B.C., as a warning in stone to those who would come after -- since the Grand Gallery is aligned with the supernova Vela X in the skies of 4000 B.C. Egypt, and the Freemasons describe 4000 B.C. as 1 Anno Lucis, which is to say the first "Year of Light." (It's kind of sad that cutting-edge Pyramidiocy has leapfrogged Noone and now dates the Pyramids to 10,500 B.C.)

Interestingly, May 5 is the day of a "dragon feast" in China -- could the celestial dragon stretching from the Sun to Saturn be cued to awaken the "dragon lines," the telluric currents, the ley flows of the Earth in cataclysm? In kabbalah, "5" is both *gab*, ("the top") and *geb*, ("the pit"), possibly implying that on 5/5 the top can become the pit, and vice versa -- possibly a connection to the End Times as prophesied in Ezekiel 21:26, in which low are "exalted" and the high "abased." A pole shift? (This, of course, also implies that the modern calendar has been consciously designed, no doubt by a Secretive Vatican Conspiracy, so that the End Times fall on 5/5/2000.) And if so, does that mean that the "seven stars" held together in Revelation 1:16, presaging the prophesied end of the world, are the seven planets aligned? Does this accord with the interesting fact that the alignment falls just seven minutes (one for each planet) short of 26 degrees, 26 being, kabbalistically, YHWH -- in other words, God?

"Inevitably when discussing a planetary alignment, someone asks, 'How often does this happen?' or 'When will it happen again?' It is hard to give a short and satisfying answer if more than two objects are involved. Of course, no series of alignments repeats exactly, but simply saying it that way is interpreted as avoiding answering the question. You'll be seen as obstructionist."
-- John Moseley of Griffith Observatory, "Planetary Alignments in 2000"

If you ask those killjoy astrophysicists, of course, the answer is "Of course not." They point out that, although the May 5 alignment is interesting (even though it won't be visible thanks to that pesky Sun), it's hardly unique. There have been seventeen even tighter alignments in the last two millennia alone, and the Earth remains triumphantly

undestroyed. Even assuming that all the planetary gravities worked together (which they won't in the May 5, 2000 alignment), they'd only increase the gravitational pull on Earth by approximately 1.6% of the impulse exerted by the Moon -- and have even less effect on the tides. The planetary conjunction will bolster the solar wind somewhat, although again far less than conjunctions of Mercury, Venus, and Jupiter alone did in 1703, 1941, and 1990. In short, it's looking good for good old planet Earth.

"One of the most famous mathematicians in Europe . . . foretold a universal flood for the year 1524. This flood was to arrive in the month of February, and nothing is more plausible; for Saturn, Jupiter and Mars were then in conjunction in the sign of Pisces. All the peoples of Europe, Asia and Africa, who heard speak of the prediction, were dismayed . . . At last the month of February arrived, and not a drop of water fell: never was month more dry, and never were the astrologers more embarrassed. Nevertheless they were not discouraged, nor neglected among us; almost all princes continued to consult them."
-- Voltaire, "Astrology" in *Dictionnaire Philosophique*

Although there's nothing to prevent you from deciding that the alignment on 5/5/2000 focuses the astral, magical energies of the planets in such wise as to shift things in a more occult sense. The closest such alignment, on February 25, 1953 B.C., combined all five visible planets, the Sun, and the Moon, within 4 degrees in Pegasus. This so impressed the Chinese, apparently, that they began the Zhuanxu calendar on the next new moon, March 5 -- surely it's the work of a moment to determine that it also caused the Fall of Ur or gave birth to Shangri-La? Is it but coincidence that the 22 degree alignment in 710 A.D. occurred in the first year of the Aztec Fourth Sun? It's kind of cool that the 29.5 degree alignment in 529 A.D. coincides with the Emperor Justinian's closing of the neo-Platonist Academy and the final occultation of magickal learning in Europe. That's the alignment that most closely replicates the 5/5/2000 setup, astrologically speaking, so perhaps today's when magick returns to Europe, *Shadowrun* style. John of Toledo predicted the end of the world for the 11 degree alignment of 1186, and no doubt whatever actually happened then, the Templars were on top of it. (Maybe that's when the Faerie left, too.) Needless to say, any of these alignments can be "when the stars come right" for that proper foaming Cthulhoid servitor cult touch.

"The Galactics will be moving away from the vibration of this planetary alignment because many of their spacecraft risk detection when the planets align to the Central Sun. They exist on a thought pattern in which they think they can't be seen, so therefore they can't be seen. But, the powerful magnetic vibrations of this planetary alignment will bounce off Mother Earth, and the Galactics could get swept up in them. This would dishevel their cloaking structure, and if that happened, you'd see a group of them parked in the sky, and suddenly your whole world would go into another shift. So they are backing out of the way to avoid the risk. In fact, there is a fairly good chance for a lot of multiple spacecraft sightings at this time."
-- "The Great Shift of May 5, 2000," channeled from "Kirael"

You're hardly restricted to affecting Earth with these various alignments. 5/5/2000 has just as good a chance of pole-shifting Venus, or awakening the Pyramids of Mars, or summoning any of the Phantom Planets like Vulcan or Nibiru from their dark-matter slumbers. *GURPS Steampunk* GMs can have the aether only become accessible following the alignments of 1624 (if you want Galileo or the Jesuits building your aether-galleons to duel on the Martian Main), 1821 (if you'd prefer to see Babbage and Faraday launch electro-magickal ships, or open the Symmes Hole to the Hollow Earth), or 1962 (which combined a 16 degree separation with a solar eclipse on February 5 for extra fun). That last one could be the alignment that finally brings the Greys out into the open, as John Glenn discovers that We Are Not Alone.

Alternatively, the end of the world could, actually, be a creation date; perhaps everything orthodox science knows before, say, December 9, 1662 (a 24 degree, 16 minute alignment) is only "Hollow History" created by the trauma of the last Alignment Catastrophe. Only after this conjunction can certain archaeologists of the uncanny (that would be the PCs, should you be curious) uncover pieces and shards of the Real Past -- which can be whatever you want, from dragon bodies slowly fossilizing in China to atomic piles in the Yucatan. It's the end of the world as the PCs know it -- and Something feels fine.

Pyramid Pick

Heirs to Merlin: the Stonehedge Tribunal (for Ars Magica)

Published by Atlas Games

Written by David Chart

168 pages + fold out map. $22.94

Heirs to Merlin provides a Storyguide with everything they need to run a saga based in the Stonehedge tribunal. . . except stats. Believe me, I was as shocked by the lack of stats as any of you, but there's a cunning method behind Atlas' apparent madness. It may seem strange for a role-playing sourcebook to be devoid of any game stats; even the NPC write-ups neglect this essential of gaming. *Heirs* chose to do this deliberately, citing two reasons. First, assigning stats to NPCs would lock the Saga into a specific power level, or necessitate a significant amount of work adapting the book to your saga. Second, giving NPCs stats would relegate the book to a Storyguide-only resource, and *Heirs to Merlin* was written specifically for both Guides and players to have access to it. The vast majority of the information in the book is setting, with actual Tribunal information occupying a scant 40+ pages. The philosophy here is that the players and Guide will enjoy learning about 1220 England and Wales as play progresses and the Saga advances. Not all guides will be comfortable with this format, as it requires them to flesh out their NPCs. If you're looking for a plug-and-play adventure compilation, this isn't it; what you will get is an in-depth examination of 13th century England with Ars Magica tacked on.

The bulk of the book consists of nine chapters, beginning with the obligatory Introduction section that explains the design choices the writer made and a few suggestions for further reading. Chapter 2 is an extensive history of Mythic England, which is very little different from the actual history of England, save for the inclusion of *Ars Magica* references and characters. Chapter 3 details the peasants of England/Wales in excruciating detail. . . excruciating, that is, if you're a peasant, but quite a pleasant read if you're not. Town life is discussed in Chapter 4, emphasizing day to day life, laws and a number of larger cities like Oxford and (of course) London. There is a nice sidebar dealing with the English Jews. It's amazing how the crown viewed an entire people as their personal cash cow.

Chapter 5 covers travel, trade and industry; its a short chapter, but gives enough information on these important basics of any saga. The church occupies chapter six. This chapter covers a lot of ground and is easily the most important aspect of any *Ars Magica* saga, especially in such a highly religious country as England. Playing counterpoint to the clergy are the nobles of chapter 7. The precariousness of the king's situation is emphasized here, and plot hooks abound. Chapter 8 covers law and governance, many aspects of which fly in the face of common sense but will greatly spice up a campaign. Chapter 9 covers Wales and explains the differences between England's culture and that of this land perched on the precipice of rebellion. Chapters 10, 11 and 12, The Order of Hermes, Politics and Myths and Legends respectively encompass the majority of the Saga-specific information and again contain dozens if not hundreds of plot hooks.

Rounding out the book are an index (very useful for finding NPCs), Glossary (very useful if your NPCs speak), and a bibliography (extra marks for showing all work). The icing on the cake is a two-page fold-out map, which is very handy. The art and format is well done and consistent with previous books in the *Ars Magica* line. Anyone familiar with *Ars Magica* will know what I mean, and I applaud the professional quality of the entire line, which is easily a match for any of the larger RPG publishers.

The vast majority of the book delves into the mundane aspects of 1220 England and does an exceptional job of portraying this era. The text is informative, though occasionally dry. This is not a bad thing, as a punchy, hip style of

writing would be far too distracting. Concise yet evocative is definitely the way to go, and frankly I *want* a sourcebook on 13th century England to read like a history text. The information provided is accurate and filled with plot hooks, even in such seemingly mundane sections like the Building section of chapter 5, for instance. This section indicates that skilled craftsmen travel from project to project, managing every aspect of the building process; the text points out that the ability to work free stone is among the most prized skills. In this one brief paragraph I can see dozens of plot hooks, such as an Ex Miscellanea mage who creates magic stone working tools, or a group of Magi who travel the land working stone and amassing political power within the Order and with the King, or perhaps his rivals. The book is filled with gems like this. ***Heirs to Merlin*** is thoroughly researched, with an attention to detail that is rarely seen outside of a ***GURPS*** world book.

Especially interesting are the depictions of the political landscape: the Stonehedge tribunal is on a cusp, with the Blackthorn covenant recently losing its political edge at tribunal. Likewise the English King Henry III is an only a child, fresh out of a civil war with his vassals, reluctant to relinquish any of their power to him, while the church seems to be biding its time. In a country on the verge of internal chaos and a tribunal whose own political landscape has recently been remade, the potential for adventure is extreme. Specific information of the Tribunal Covenants is deliberately vague, but only to allow the Storyguide to adapt the setting to their own particular saga. There is enough specific information to entice players who read the book (which is encouraged by the author) to know enough of what's going on to feel at home in England, but not enough to spoil their enjoyment of the Saga.

Frankly there is little in the book that can't be read by the players; the covenant descriptions are deliberately vague, consisting of common knowledge and a few choice bits of rumor and inferred possibilities. There is enough room for the Storyguide to mold the actual Tribunal to whatever he/she wishes without contradicting the actual text of the book, which many players will interpret as Canon. With the right group of players this can work admirably and intensify their enjoyment of the Saga. There's a bit more work for the Storyguide, but giving everyone access to ***Heirs to Merlin*** will allow everyone to immerse themselves in the intricacies of the 13th century. Just watching your players hold their own in an English court or a royal audience is reward enough for giving up that little bit of control by allowing them to read this book. The excellent and comprehensive work that Atlas has put into this book makes ***Heirs to Merlin*** an excellent window into this era.

-- Andy Lucas

The Lessons of Voltron

Nostalgia, is, at its heart, a fairly selfish pursuit: those who understand what you're talking about nod knowingly, and those that don't are forced to suffer through a pointless rambling about something they are probably disinterested in.

Having said that, let me talk about *Voltron*.

Voltron was the name of a Japanese cartoon and also the giant robot appearing in that cartoon. It consisted of five smaller robot lions (or, in another series, fifteen smaller vehicles) that, when the command was given, would form Voltron.

Television aimed at children has long understood that kids love repetition. From *Sesame Street* sketches that have been on the air for decades, to *Blues Clues*, the logical extension that shows the same show several times a week. Using the logical fallacy of the converse, then, we can conclude that *Voltron* must have been aimed at children. Because *Voltron* **loved** its repetition.

Each episode would follow the same basic plot:

- The witch Hagar (directed by ultimate bad person Zarkon) creates a giant evil robot that will *surely* defeat Voltron this time.
- The giant evil robot causes destruction until the five lions (or whatever) that make up Voltron show up to deal with it.
- They each fight the big, bad robot individually, and get their butts kicked.
- Someone on the good guys' side finally realizes that they may have better luck fighting the big, bad robot if they, themselves, were a big (good) robot. So the command is given to form Voltron.
- As Voltron, they fight the big, bad robot for a while, and *still* get their butts kicked.
- Suddenly, someone remembers, "Waitaminute! We have this really cool weapon, the Sword of Arus! It's our most powerful attack! Lets give that a shot!"
- They pull out this impossibly long sword and, using only their mighty sword attack, manage to defeat the evil robot at the last minute.
- The witch curses Voltron, but vows that next time, oh yes, next time, she will defeat them.
- End credits.

While not quite as formulaic as, say, your average romantic comedy, *Voltron* was nonetheless pretty predictable. And, dramatically speaking, it worked (at least, it appealed to eight-year-olds). There was a threat, dramatic tension as the good guys lose, a hopeful moment as they get their act together and form Voltron, more dramatic tension as the good guys lose, and then, at the last possible moment, elation as the good guys manage to save the day, using their powerful attack.

From a gaming standpoint, though, there's just one *slight*, itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny problem with it:

It would never work.

No, at the first sign of danger, any group of PCs would *immediately* form Voltron and have that sword pulled out. No questions asked. An inhuman shriek from above? Form Voltron, draw the sword, enter battle. The sound of an explosion from over the hill? Form Voltron, draw the sword, go investigate. Telephone rings? Form Voltron, draw the sword, answer the phone.

In many games, folks tend to find their Sword of Arus fairly early on. . . that one attack, the one gimmick, their one ability that ends most conflicts. And, unlike Voltron, most players (wisely) don't wait until they get the snot beaten out of them before they draw that sword. Examples my own characters have found?

- Pulling the pins on grenades and holding them, relying on defenses I had and the baddies didn't.

- Using telekinesis to raise enemies into the air, removing them from range on the way up and turning them into pulp when they hit the ground.
- Turning invisible, sneaking up, and using a powerful touch-only attack.

It's one of the great paradoxes in gaming. . . the story-telling aspect versus the game aspect. While I won't go into that here (much), I will point out that a character like Indiana Jones would be, in most RPGs, less successful than Dutch, Arnold Schwarzenegger's character in Predator; While Indy is more versatile and (in my opinion) more interesting, Dutch kicks more butt. We like Indy because he breaks even, but we like Dutch because he wins.

Many games reward the "one good thing," too. In *In Nomine*, your flat-average angel or demon is going to fail an average task about 58% of the time, and your average attribute check in *AD&D 2nd Edition* has a 50/50 chance of working. But if your Strength/Laser Pistol/Computer Hacking is maxed out, then you will (or at least try to) solve most situations with Strength, Laser Pistol, or Computer Hacking.

I'm not sure what conclusions can be drawn from this, to be honest. I think the most important lesson to glean is: make sure the PCs and GM are on the same wavelength when designing characters. If one player is making a character that can be used in many situations, but isn't terribly good at any, while the others are making Thog Onenote, Master of Brawling, then this is going to affect the game. Likewise, if the GM is expecting the players to be the best there is at what they do, then players may want to plan accordingly.

As for myself, I tend to make characters that are versatile, but also very good at something. . . preferably something not immediately applicable. How *do* you make yourself useful in combat when your primary skill is Psychology? Or your main super-power is Flight? Or your strongest attack takes three rounds to activate?

And while I'm trying to figure that out in combat, I generally hide behind the other players. . . who are busily drawing the big sword.

* * *

I made the threat in the chat room, and I'll make it here: We need reviews. If Steven doesn't start getting reviews soon, Steven will start recruiting reviewers with a bat.

So. . . we need reviews. Your odds of getting a regular article accepted are about one in ten currently. Your odds of getting a review of a current game rejected are about four to one against; it would need to be written in misspelled Gaelic with a dull yellow crayon. Even then, I'd probably just ask you to correct the spelling.

Speaking of chat rooms and nostalgia, for those of you who don't attend the Pyramid chat area, you may want to consider joining us. Just a couple days ago we came up with *GURPS* television crossovers, the most promising of which (in my mind) was *GURPS Love Boat / Prisoner*.

"Where am I?"
"Aboard the Love Boat."
"Who are you?"
"You are in cabin number six."
"I won't fall in love."
"By hook or by crook, you will."

And, yes, Number One would be revealed to be. . . coochie-girl Charo. Be very afraid.

We now return you to a nostalgia-free zone.

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: **The Ultimate Powers Book**, p. 70 (for **Marvel Super Heroes**)

(Two stars) "Getting to the sigils, however, is difficult, since the room is really not empty at all. In fact, it is not really a room. The entire area of the room is filled with solid rock, rendered permanently invisible by a powerful spell. . . . Those who attempt to *teleport* into the room (past the barrier) find that they have teleported into solid rock, for all of the rest of their fellow adventurers to see."

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Click here for the animated version! [424K]

Murphy's Rules

Fun and Profit Part Two: The Fine Art of Art

Welcome to part two of my series on How to Run a Game Company. This month I will address the reality of one of the most frequently neglected, and yet possibly most important, aspects of game production: the art. Whether simple line drawings meant to clarify a point in the text or complex paintings to amaze the reader, art can be a help or a hindrance to any game project. Like writing, art is a skill best left to the professionals, but an informed manager or consumer is never a bad thing. If I have convinced you to start a game company in Part One, and you went out and designed the game over the last four weeks, you are probably anxious to know what to do next. The next part of game production is gathering and adding the art that will give your game a polished and professional look. So without further ado, on to this month's installment - Part Two: The Fine Art of Art.

First, there are several people to add to our *dramatis personae* who will deal mostly with a game's art. The first, and in many ways most important, is the Art Director. This person will usually have management responsibility for all aspects of the project's art, from creation of the art specs, through selection of the artists, to final approval of the book's look. He or she is very important, and, unless you have a good sense of how you want the book to look, might be a good place to insert a second person into your little company. Of course, there will also be artists, the people who actually produce the art. This might be a single person with many talents, or a combination of people such as pencillers, inkers, colorists, etc., each of whom has a special skill. Finally, there will be production artists, who will be responsible for a book's physical design and layout.

Regardless of how many hands will eventually touch it, all game art starts with the art specs. These little one or two sentence descriptions describe possible art. If, for example, a writer has written about a barbarian horde, he or she might include an art spec suggesting that this section might benefit from a picture of a barbarian horde. Special equipment, non-player characters, or other interesting bits that are easier shown than described are good candidates for art specs. If the writer has not included these in the draft of the text, the art director will have to generate them. The AD will then choose artists to execute the various pieces of art and send the art specs, perhaps including the relevant section of the manuscript. Of course, sometimes artists will only get the specs. In the earliest days of **Magic: The Gathering**, artists received only the card's name. They did not know what the card did, nor had seen the flavor text. This made for some spectacular interpretations of card titles. A particular game can have anywhere from zero to hundreds of pieces of art, but most will get by with spot art on a half to two-thirds of the pages of a book.

These days, some artists still work with traditional materials, while many have begun to generate some or all of their art using a computer. There is no inherent advantage to either decision, but each technique has different results that can be better suited to certain art pieces. If the art director wants to alter the work after the artist has completed it, he or she should be sure that the artist works in a way that will lend itself to that manipulation. If pre-press work is done on a computer, and the artists are using pen and ink, or other non-electronic materials, production artists will have to scan in the art, and make sure that it is readable by the layout program, as well as add any spot color or other enhancements to the original art.

If your game is a licensed product, you can often get access to art as a part of the license terms. This will mean that you will not have to seek out artists acceptable to your budget and the quality control of your licensor. It will also insure that your game has art whose style and subject matter is familiar to your fans. Access to art can also seriously shrink your art budget, sometimes enough to cover a large part of the advance you will need to pay to secure the license.

Barring word of mouth or a printed review, the first impression a customer will have of your game is its cover. Indeed, the cover will be smiling off the shelf at potential buyers, and though it should not be necessary to say so, ought to convey some idea as to what people can expect inside the book. Cover art can easily be the most difficult and expensive part of the art process, but a beautifully executed cover can often pay for itself through increased sales. Nevertheless, it is not always necessary to pay thousands of dollars for an original painting. Artists often sell only "first use" rights for their paintings and can therefore sell them again for use on other projects. These second run rights are much cheaper and artists are often eager to sell them again. Of course, the danger is that sharp-eyed fans will

recognize the art as a retread. However, a good art director and a large collection of older paperback books from your game's genre is often a treasure trove of good ideas for second rights covers. In any case, make sure your cover is attractive and representative. If customers do not pick it up to look at it, they are unlikely to buy it.

However, the actual painting on the cover is not the only issue. The titles on the cover, which should include the game line's title and the book's title at a minimum, should be readable and representative. Some thought should also be given to the way the games will be displayed on the store shelves. If the games will be displayed on cascade racks, putting the titles on the top will maximize their visibility. Recognizing that many store managers are overlapping books on a single shelf, some designers are beginning to print the titles on the left side of the cover, so that overlapping covers will conceal no part of the title.

Though it is not often thought of as "art," a book's layout frequently contributes to its overall beauty and ease of use. Layout, the way the text and art is arrayed on the page, is the responsible of the production artists, and they will have many tiny but important decisions to make. The fact that the New York Times is immediately distinguishable from the Wall Street Journal, or *GURPS*' style is different from that of *7th Sea* is due in large part to layout. The design of the book affects the size and number of art pieces a game can have, as well as the number of words that will fit on the page. Other layout issues include the size and type style of chapter titles and sub-headings, in addition to the question of page margins and the possibility of borders.

Here's an interesting aside about game art: Since artists usually retain the right to the actual physical art, they are often willing to sell them to fans of the game. This is true not only of internal spot art for RPGs, but also for cover art, and in most cases, CCG art. Most interior RPG art is done at roughly the scale at which it is reproduced, but covers and CCG pieces can be almost any size. Unfortunately, the price also varies widely-from $10 to $1000's. Some well-known RPG artists regularly auction original art on eBay, or sell it through their own websites. Those artists who go to conventions usually have pieces to sell, or accept commissions on custom pieces. For the collector on a budget, lithographs or other prints of an artist's most famous works are often available at conventions for far less than original pieces. Collecting original game art is a good way to demonstrate your appreciation of a particular game, support the artists who help to create it, and decorate your apartment with some genuinely classy items.

Game art is one of the most overlooked and yet most potentially advantageous parts of a game design. It can attract or repel potential customers, and can make the game easier or harder to play. Excellent game art is recognized by the Academy of Adventure Gaming Arts & Design with through the Origins Awards in the categories of Best Graphic Presentation of a Board Game, Best Graphic Presentation of a Card Game or Expansion, and Best Graphic Presentation of a Roleplaying Game, Adventure, or Supplement. Recent winners include Timbuk II's *Wadjet*, and Steve Jackson Games' own *In Nomine*. A fine art, indeed.

Pyramid Review

Aurora Australis (for Trinity)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by James Kiley and Scott Nimmo with Bruce Baugh

144 pages, $19.95

Aurora Australis is the fifth in a series of supplements detailing one of Psi Orders
of the science fiction roleplaying game *Trinity*. It's also the first one published
under the ArtHaus, White Wolf's imprint for games whose sales are good enough
to escape the axe, but not good enough to warrant more than a few products a year. In addition, *Aurora Australis* is
the last *Trinity* supplement developed under Andrew Bates, who guided the line from its inception and has now left
White Wolf to pursue freelance projects of his own. Consequently, *Aurora Australis* is a transitional book for a game
line that failed to live up to the potential White Wolf placed in it two and a half years ago. It's also a good object lesson
on why this is the case.

To begin with, *Aurora Australis* is the first Psi Order sourcebook without a portion of its pages presented in full color.
For someone familiar with earlier supplements like myself, this was somewhat jarring. Admittedly, the *Trinity Players
Guide* preceded *Aurora Australis* down this path, but I couldn't help but be disappointed. As I understand it, the
inclusion of full color glossy pages made *Trinity* a very expensive line to produce. Given that it never proved as
popular as White Wolf had hoped, it's understandable that corners had to be cut somewhere to keep it viable even
under the ArtHaus imprint. Likewise, much of the interior art isn't of the same high quality as seen in previous
supplements -- further evidence of the diminished state of the game line.

Fortunately, the quality of the writing is up to the same high standards seen in other *Trinity* products. In fact, some of
it is very good indeed. Psi Order sourcebooks always consist of two broad sections. The first details the organization
and mission of one of the setting's psionic groups, in this case the psychokinetic Legions. The second section details
the region with which the Order is most strongly connected, which for the Legions is Australia and the South Pacific.
While I've always had some in-game qualms about this set-up, it does make for a wonderfully double-use sourcebook,
an approach I wouldn't mind seeing used in other game lines.

The Legions are the Aberrant-kicking warriors of the Trinity universe. Using their psychokinetic powers, they defend
humanity through martial prowess and feats of arms. The first section of the book provides information on the Order's
organization (including the various sub-Legions that comprise it), mission types, and relations with other Psi Orders.
As with past Psi Order books, *Aurora Australis* includes alternate psychokinetic powers to add further depth to
Legionnaires. I have a few small beefs with the material in this section (such as the odd rank titles for each of the
Legions), but overall it's a workmanlike handling of the material. I doubt either players or Storytellers will have much
to complain about here.

The second section details what the book calls "Austronesia," that is Australia and portion of the South Pacific. To my
mind, this portion of the book is much more interesting (and useful) than the first section, but that may say more about
my own lack of knowledge about Down Under than anything else. This section provides a host of information on the
societies, cultures, and governments of the region. This includes details on corporations, political groups, even
musicians and artists. It's fairly comprehensive in its scope. With this book, Storytellers should have no problem
running a *Trinity* series in the area.

The book is rounded out with three shorter sections. The first of these, Storyteller Information, is far too short. It offers advice on running a Legions series, as well as some other tidbits about life in Austronesia (like weapons laws - a useful entry), and the Aberrants active in the region. The information on running a Legions series could have filled many more pages, especially given that the Legions organize themselves along military lines. Military roleplaying has to my mind always been a difficult genre to pull off properly. The advice in this section acknowledges it and offers some suggestions on contentious issues like chain of command and following orders, but it's hardly enough. I had really hoped we'd get a lot more than this section provides.

The second short section focuses on new weapons and equipment. I'm not a huge fan of such things. Thus, its brevity was actually a blessing from my perspective, although I suspect many players will be disappointed. The final section, "Dramatis Personae," is a collection of non-player character Legionnaires, many of whom are high-level commanders, including the Proxy in charge of all the Legions. This is rounded out with character templates, a couple of which offer an unusual perspective on the Psi Order. I'd have liked a few more low-level Legionnaires than provided -- if only as NPCs with whom players are likely to interact -- but it's a small complaint that many Storytellers will not share.

In the end, I like *Aurora Australis*, even if it lacks both the attention to detail seen in previous releases and the focus I'd always hoped *Trinity* would acquire. For example, there's an illustration of an Australian naval vessel bearing the name "H.M.A.S. Kelly," even though we're told Australia is now a republic. Likewise, the lack of focus is a much larger concern. There is such a wealth of material here, some of it covering so many different elements of the setting that it's hard to get a good grasp on what to do with it all. The brevity of the Storyteller's advice only compounds this problem. Without better guidance, I suspect many readers will be overwhelmed by it all -- much like *Trinity* as a line, which is a shame. Nevertheless, I hope *Aurora Australis* sells well enough to warrant future publications by ArtHaus. If not, *Trinity* may die as it lived: a game with great potential hampered by too diffuse a focus and not enough advice on how to use its many genuinely fascinating elements.

-- James David Maliszewski

by Rich Bowman

Art by [Keith Johnson](#)

You've conquered kingdoms in Yrth, stalked the night in *Vampire*, destroyed the Wyrm in *Werewolf*, surfed the Cybernetica and sailed the stars in *Traveller*. What haven't you done?

You haven't run your own campaign.

You've seen the maps your GM has drawn, read his histories and rampaged in his imagination. You've killed every monster and villain he's thrown at you, and even a couple times achieved godhood. Don't you think it's your turn to torment the players and wreak havoc in your favorite campaign world? Of course it is. Now how do you do it?

It's not so hard, actually. It just takes some time and perseverance, and though it may seem daunting at times, you'll find that it usually turns into a labor of love. To help you get started, I am providing a few pointers.

Organize Your Campaign

Be early to each of your games. This allows you to prepare the game site and get your notes and playing aids prepared.

Start the game on time. Even if some of your players are late, you need to set the example. If the players know that you will wait for them before starting, they will be more willing to be late; before you know it, your eight o'clock game is starting at ten.

Make a "mini-worldbook" outlining the political and social situations in your campaign, along with what brought it to this point and which tensions are getting ready to come to a head. Along with this, give a brief verbal history to refresh some points and lay plot lines for their characters to follow up on when the game starts.

Set up instructional encounters throughout your first session to ease your players into the mechanics of your world.

Consider using pre-generated characters for your first attempts. This will eliminate the potentially confusing pre game creation session where the players will be trying to guess your style and what skills and abilities they will need to survive your campaign. When you pre-generate, you are eliminating the need to waste your first evening in a paper shuffle. Don't worry about your group not knowing how to play

them, that is what the instructional encounters are good for.

Set Up a Playing Area

Where you decide to play your game has a big impact on the mood, atmosphere and the overall effectiveness of your campaign. You should select a place where you have control over background noise and distractions. There a number of options open to you, but only a few are mentioned here.

Your home. This is by far the best place to hold your game, as you have the most control over eliminating distractions. Make sure you turn off your TV, move the phone into another room, and make sure your stereo is playing nothing but atmosphere setting music. This is probably more of an option for single gamemasters, as spouses and significant others tend to frown on a room full of Roleplayers making a lot of noise, eating everything in the cupboards and keeping the kids up. Unless, of course, you can convince him or her to join in the fun!

A local game store. If the home option doesn't pan out, move on down to the second home for most gamers. Here you will often find tables set up for in-house games, and as long as you coordinate with the owners, you should have no problem (a table of gamers is more likely to buy products than browsers). It may also loosen your players up and get them into the game more if they know that their antics won't disturb other denizens of your home. They are surrounded by a distinctive gaming atmosphere and there are a myriad of source material on hand for the oddball questions and circumstances that crop up in every session. Unfortunately, there are some bad points. The background noise can be annoying, and there are always people hanging around the table asking questions and telling the players what they would do if they were playing. And, of course, there is the phone and ever present door chime that has a nasty habit of drawing away players' attention at crucial moments.

A players' house. Sure, this sounds like an outstanding choice, but in reality should only be used as a last resort. When you accept the hospitality of one of your players, he or she may come to expect a favored status in the game. Even if he or she doesn't, the other players may begin to suspect that you are fudging in their favor when a reaction roll comes up incredibly high or that really nasty NPC makes a critical miss.

Keep the Game Moving

You've seen it. Everything seems to be going great when you start to notice that you are more easily distracted than you were last week. The GM's plotline appears to be playing out and a new one doesn't seem to be in the works. Your fellow players start to become occasional no shows and the out-of-character banter becomes more frequent than the intense in-game poses. Before you know it, the game dies out.

You must keep this from happening to you. A few times are inevitable, but any more than that and you will cultivate a reputation of dull games and none but the most irritating and unwanted players will come to your table. Though thoughts of how to avoid this are daunting, it isn't actually that hard. The main thing is to keep in mind where you were going when you started, get there and set out for the next goal. To that end, try these suggestions:

Always have your scenarios planned out at least two sessions in advance. This way, when your troupe of over zealous adventurers surprise you by completing the current quest halfway through the night you won't be left trying to come up with spur of the moment encounters. You will be able to move right into the next plot and in doing so, keep alive the spirit that drove them to complete the first adventure early.

Keep your ideas fresh. For some people this isn't hard; the ideas pour from them so intensely you can almost see them squirming around in their head trying to get out. For the rest of us it isn't so simple. After a while they just seem to fizzle out. The solution? Read. Read anything: a book, magazine or short story. You'd be amazed at what stimulates your imagination!

Don't let your group get too big. The more you grow, the slower the action and the easier it is for the uninvolved players to get bored. Try to keep the game to a maximum of six or seven people. This tends to be the optimum number

to keep everyone's attention to the game and maximizing character interaction.

On the other hand, don't let your group get too small, either. You will always have players drop for one reason or another, but don't let that space remain empty for too long. When you first start, you may have to actively recruit players for that seat, but after a while (if you're good enough) you will generate a waiting list. However you have to do it, fill that seat! If you are still down a player when the next one leaves, that's pretty much it. You'll be fighting a downhill battle to keep your game alive.

Make sure that your players are game ready when they sit down at the table. If you're not using pre-generated characters, contact your players before the first game starts and set up times when you can sit down with them individually to supervise their character creation. This way, when the game starts, you will be able to move smoothly from the briefing to game play. Along these lines, have those on your waiting list provide you with a couple of characters that they are interested in playing, so when it comes time for them to join, they will have a better chance of integrating into the party.

Be Flexible

After every gaming session ask your players for input. Have them tell you at least one thing they liked about the session and one thing they disliked. This will give you an idea of what things you are doing right and those that you need to work on. Just remember to take all of these comments as suggestions and not personal attack or adulation. Don't let the likes go to your head nor the dislikes to your heart and you will be able to combine them into a workable solution.

Have Fun

Take any or all of the tools presented herein, tweak them to suit your situation, stir them up and serve your players and yourself an Enjoyable Role Playing Experience.

by Justin Bacon

Art by Rob Nemeth and colored by Philip Reed

Art used by permission of Atlas Games

Unknown Armies, designed by Greg Stolze and John Tynes and published by Atlas Games, features a unique system of magick. Magick is practiced by adepts, each of which subscribes to a specific school of magick. Based on what school the adept belongs to he builds up "charges" in various ways -- members of the school of Pornomancy, for example, build up charges by engaging in ritualized sexual acts; members of the school of Dipsomancy, on the other hand, build up charges by being drunk. These charges (which can be classified as minor, significant, or major based on what the adept did to gain them) can then be expended to create magickal effects.

Magick is, above all, affected by three laws. First, the Law of Symbolic Tension demands that all magick be based on some form an underlying paradox. Hence the adepts of pornomancy gain charges by engaging in sexual acts, but can't gain pleasure in those acts. Adepts of dipsomancy, in contrast, surrender control over their bodies (by getting drunk) in order to gain control over the universe (in the form of magick).

Second, the Law of Transaction says that you can't get more out of magick than what you put in. Therefore you get minor effects from minor charges and major effects from major charges.

Third, the Law of Obedience states that adepts can only subscribe to a single school of magick. The schools are mutually exclusive, despite all being based on the same underlying truth, because they each involved interpreting that truth in different ways.

Each school is possessed of standardized rituals which can be cast fairly automatically and also random, improvised magick - which is more difficult and less powerful. All magick cast within a specific school, however, must be based on the principles of the school.

This article details a new school of magick for *Unknown Armies*, Emotiomancy. It uses the same format as the schools described in the main rulebook.

Emotiomancy (Emotion-Based Magick)

Emotions are the primal essence of humanity. Thoughts may define us, but it is emotions which make us what we are. They are a window into the soul and a way by which people may be manipulated and controlled. But emotions are also tools which may be used for good, they are -- after all -- the source of happiness and love and joy.

This is the domain of the emotiomancer, an expert at the unnatural control of man's emotions. By creating and harnessing emotions in others, the emotiomancer uses those emotions to create and manipulate others.

The advantage to this for many is that the emotiomancer possesses an immense understanding of human thought, emotion, and interaction. This type of emotiomancer is usually extremely popular with others and capable of getting almost anything they want. The drawback, however, is that the emotiomancer slowly ends up distancing themselves from others. Having to manipulate others in order to gain power which allows them to manipulate others, the emotiomancer slowly finds himself valuing others less. They run the risk of either disconnecting so completely with other people that they lose their ability to create charges, or to succumbing to dark impulses.

Other emotiomancers simply begin with dark impulses. They excel at creating fear and hatred; at controlling and creating the darker emotions. They indulge in their alienation from humanity. The emotiomancers who embrace the brighter side of life generally despise these "dark emotiomancers" for the bad reputation they give to their school of magick. Dark emotiomancers do have the advantage of being able to perform some forms of magick which other emotiomancers cannot.

Emotiomancy Blast Style: Only dark emotiomancy charges (see below) can be used to generate a blast effect, taking the form of an intense pain which rips through the victim's mind. Like the pornomantic blast, the damage which it does cannot be explained by medical science, but unlike the pornomantic blast the emotiomantic blast is always possessed of some secondary physical effect -- some form of stereotyped emotional reaction taken to the extreme. Examples would be flushes which are strong enough to burst blood vessels or nosebleeds for lust.

Stats

Generate a Minor Charge: Emotiomancers can generate two types of charges -- one from generating positive emotions, the other from generating negative emotions. In most cases these emotions can be used interchangeably, but in some cases powers are only available to those who have generated dark charges. To generate a minor charge the adept must create a situation which creates an emotional reaction in someone they do not know. The emotion must be the result of actions specifically planned by the adept in order to create the charge (so you can't make someone laugh at an impromptu joke and get a charge from it, although planning an elaborate situation in which to tell the joke would do it) and can't be beneficial to the adept (so you can't seduce someone and then have sex with them, although you could seduce them and then leave). This isn't really all that difficult (helping someone across the street or buying them flowers can often generate a positive emotion and a minor charge), but the fact that the emotion must be coldly and manipulatively created makes it difficult from the standpoint of the adept.

Generate a Significant Charge: Significant positive charges are formed by creating extremely positive emotional reactions in people who you do not know, following the same restrictions as those for minor charges. Significant negative charges, on the other hand, are made by creating extremely negative emotional reactions in people who are close to you and in such a way that they know you are responsible for them feeling that way (nor are they allowed to

know that it is merely in the interests of generating a charge for you; that "taints" the emotion through selflessness -- unless of course that makes them feel even worse about it).

Generate a Major Charge: Generating a major charge requires the character to create an emotional situation of a severity which will be remembered by the person effected for the rest of their lives. The adept himself will be forced to remember the event for the rest of their lives, as well. As with significant charges, positive charges must be generated with strangers while negative charges must be created by effecting those close to the adept.

Taboo: While it is generally easier for emotiomancers to gain charges than other schools, it is also easier for them to lose them: Emotiomancers can lose their existing charges if they do anything to ruin an "emotional moment." Specifically, if they interrupt a positive emotional moment (talking during the end of a romantic film or telling people to "get a room") they lose their negative charges. If they interrupt a negative emotion (by cheering somebody up or even saving someone from torture) they lose their positive charges. As a result of this dichotomy emotiomancers often find themselves treading a dangerous line -- people who are generally nice can create positive charges fairly easily, but will lose them if they stop other people from feeling bad; people who are nasty can generate negative charges easily, but they can never do anything even marginally positive.

Random Magick Domain: Emotiomancers control peoples emotions and, through them, their thoughts. They are the masters of manipulation. Their skills lie entirely within the realm of effecting how others think and feel.

Starting Charges: Newly created emotiomancers start with four minor charges.

Emotiomancy Minor Formula Spells

Charm

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: Using this spell allows the emotiomancer to subtly play upon another person's emotions, binding them to him. If a positive charge is used, whoever they are and whatever their normal reactions towards the emotiomancer would be, they will feel as if he were their best friend in the world. If a negative charge is used the spell makes them act in zombie-like obedience to the character (the advantage is that they are willing to do more; the drawback is that they won't be capable of much intelligent, complicated, or conceptually difficult action). The spell only lasts for a number of minutes equal to the emotiomancer's skill in magick. Afterwards the victim will remember everything which has transpired, although they may be unsure of the reason why it happened (members of the Occult Underground, of course, will immediately suspect magickal influences of some sort).

Minor Suggestion

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This spell allows the emotiomancer to make a single suggestion to another person. The other person will be extremely receptive to the suggestion made by the emotiomancer and will act on it unless it is completely contrary to their normal behavior (loyal security guards won't abandon their posts, but might be willing to give someone a security tape even though it was against regulations). The victim cannot leave the presence of the emotiomancer or the spell will be broken. Afterwards the character won't remember the suggestion or the action taken.

Confuse

Cost: 1 or 2 minor charges
Effect: With a single charge cast of Confuse the emotiomancer can target a single person and batter them with conflicting emotions. The character will still be able to take actions, but will do so at a slower rate of speed (in combat conditions this translates to halving successful initiative checks and only allowing characters to take actions on every other turn). Using two charges allows the emotiomancer to target a group of up to five people. The spell lasts until the effected person or persons makes a successful Soul check at -15% (one check can be made every turn of combat or

once every minute).

Overwhelm

Cost: 2 minor positive charges or 1 minor negative charge
Effect: Overwhelm has a similar effect as Confuse, forcing emotions upon its victim. In this case only a single emotion - one of the emotiomancer's choosing (but consistent with the type of charge used) - is forced, and that one completely overwhelms the person's ability to take any action which isn't ordained by that emotion. This reaction will not always be what the emotiomancer may have expected or even wanted, but can be resisted with a successful Soul check at the time of casting. If the check fails the spell's effects will last about fifteen minutes.

Example: Jeffrey, an emotiomancer, has been confronted in a darkened alley by his arch-nemesis, Chameleon. Jeffrey uses two positive charges and casts Overwhelm on Chameleon, choosing to strike her with lust. She immediately drops the gun and goes off looking to satisfy her urges. Jeffrey, on the other hand, is more than a little insulted that she didn't like his looks.

Empathy

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: With this spell the emotiomancer can read the emotions of another person at the time of casting. With a successful Soul check the emotiomancer can also get a vague impression of what caused or is causing the emotion.

Numb

Cost: 1 minor charge
Effect: This spell will numb the emotions and feelings of anyone, including the emotiomancer himself. For the duration of the spell -- equal in minutes to the emotiomancer's skill -- the recipient will feel nothing, including physical pain (although the physical damage will still occur).

Affect Mind

Cost: 3 minor charges
Effect: This temporarily effects a person's mental abilities -- either raising or lowering it by an amount equal to half of the emotiomancer's magickal skill. The effect lasts for about ten minutes and isn't capable of granting knowledge which the recipient didn't possess before, only of improving the character's mental aptitude. The emotiomancer cannot use this spell on himself.

Emotiomancy Significant Formula Spells

Control

Cost: 2 significant charges
Effect: Control allows the emotiomancer to, effectively, completely enslave the target of the spell for a number of minutes equal to his Soul plus his magickal skill (although the victim can make a Soul check at -20% every five minutes). As with Minor Suggestion the person will still resist any commands completely repellent to his nature (so you can't have him kill his friend), but can follow multiple commands during the duration of the spell and can even leave the emotiomancer's presence to carry out the orders.

Significant Suggestion

Cost: 1 significant charge

Effect: Like Control, Significant Suggestion is a more powerful version of Minor Suggestion (as the name implies). Like Minor Suggestion, Significant Suggestion is only able to give a single suggestion to another person and that person must remain in the presence of the emotiomancer while carrying it out. However, a Significant Suggestion completely overrides a person's inhibitions - with it the emotiomancer can convince the person to do anything. If the action is contrary to the person's belief systems (i.e., something which wouldn't pass as a minor suggestion) the person gets a chance to resist, making a Soul check. If it's a particularly serious transgression (such as killing their own mother) the GM may modify this check in the victim's favor as he sees fit.

Warp

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: With Warp the emotiomancer temporarily simulates the effects of the House of Renunciation, absolutely switching the most important elements of the victim's personality to its polar opposite (so that a cruel person becomes kind, a person with a vendetta instead finds ways to help her former target). When the spell is first cast the person gets to make a Soul check to see if they are effected by the spell. If that fails the person can make an additional check every hour at -50% until they throw off the effect of the spell.

Phobia

Cost: 1 significant negative charge
Effect: With this spell the emotiomancer instills a great fear of a specific item, animal, individual, or situation in his target -- an intense phobia. Whenever the victim encounters the stimulus from that point forward they will suffer a paralyzing fear until the stimulus has passed. Whenever this phobia inflicts itself the victim can make a Soul check at -20% as they attempt to resist what they subconsciously realize is an unnatural impulse. If they are successful, the phobia will no longer effect them.

Fixation

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: In many ways the exact opposite of the emotiomancer's Phobia spell, Fixation allows him to specify a goal which the victim must attempt to fulfill. If the goal is something which is theoretically achievable (anything from "eat a hot dog" to "steal the Mona Lisa" would be acceptable) then there is no way for the victim to remove the spell's effects (without other unnatural influences) unless they succeed at achieving their goal. If the goal is something which is impossible ("eat all the hot dogs in the world" or "steal the Eiffel Tower") then the victim can make a Soul check at -20% once a day to overthrow the effects of the fixation (although they must attempt to fulfill their fixation up until that point). The fixation cannot be something which would be immediately deadly to the character ("throw yourself off a cliff" or "shoot yourself in the head") or completely alien to their belief system (you couldn't convince a nun to sleep with someone), but other than that things are wide open. Finally, the degree of intensity for the fixation depends on its complexity. If the fixation was to "eat a hot dog" then the person would probably immediately drop what they were doing and go out to find a hot dog. If, on the other hand, the fixation was to "steal the Mona Lisa" they wouldn't just walk into the Louvre and try to pick it up - they would be allowed to research and concoct a plan before proceeding. All of this is at the GM's discretion.

Empathic Connection

Cost: 1 significant charge
Effect: With this spell the emotiomancer can create an empathic connection between any two minds (not necessarily including his own). By expending minor charges he can add additional people to the link (one charge per person, up to a total of six). Anyone who is a member of the link will feel the emotions of the other people through the link, identifying who the emotion actually belongs to). Typically the nature of the link allows the recipient to distance themselves from the emotions of others, but for particularly intense feelings (such as the pain of being tortured or the heartache of seeing a loved one leave you) other members of the link must make a Soul check or be overwhelmed. At no point in time do other members of the link know what caused the emotion -- only the emotion itself. The link lasts

for twenty-four hours, but can be extended for another twenty-four hours if the emotiomancer expends a minor charge for every member of the link. This can be continued indefinitely.

Mind Link

Cost: 3 significant charges
Effect: A more powerful version of the Empathic Connection, the Mind Link allows the emotiomancer to connect the minds of up to six individuals (using the same procedures as for Empathic Connection, with each additional person in the link above two costing a single minor charge). In this case, however, the members of the link will be able to see, feel, and hear everything which the other members of the link experience by focusing on that individual. However, a person can only focus one such set of sensory inputs at once -- so if you're focused on someone else, you don't know what's happening to you. The emotiomancer, through his magickal training, can attempt to process multiple "feeds" at once -- including his own. To do so, he makes a Mind check with a -10% penalty for every additional link above two he attempts to process (so he would have a -10% penalty for three links at once -- including his own -- and a penalty of -40% if he attempted to process all six members of a link at once). If he succeeds, he successfully processes the multiple feed for a single combat round or for a minute, having to make the check again every minute or combat round after that point. If he fails, he is paralyzed for five combat rounds or minutes from mental overload.

Emotiomancy Major Effects

When you create a major emotiomancy effect you are toying with the basic elements of human existence as if they were mere whims. Emotiomancers are capable of driving men beyond the brink of insanity; causing massive, permanent shifts in personality; enslaving entire populations to their will (although the larger the population the less likely it will be a permanent effect); or even fundamentally altering the emotional responses of people (instead of just polarizing their compulsions, for example, you could have people hate those they have always loved and love those they have always hated). In short, the emotions and thoughts of man are your playthings and you are capable of doing anything with them you wish.

Pyramid Review

Hârnmaster: Barbarians

Published by [Columbia Games](#)

96 Pages on 3 ring-binder format cardstock, $29.98

Hârn, for those not in the know, is a generic fantasy setting. In fact, it might be called *the* generic fantasy setting since it was one of the first to be published and succeed purely on the strength of the background and without being tied to any particular game system. Hârn is a large island, divided up into several kingdoms, with a feel that can best be described as "low fantasy." Magic exists but is rare and frightening to most people. The day to day workings of the world, in terms of how many peasants are out in the fields to support the proud knight on his horse, and how the King is collecting the taxes to support his armies of bureaucrats, are worked out with a dedication to detail enough to satisfy the most anal-retentive realist GM. Another selling factor is that Columbia has decided not to advance "official" Harnic history beyond the "current" date, so new releases will expand on but not invalidate older ones.

Now, despite the fact that you can use Hârn with any game system (a particularly fine adaptation to *GURPS*, written not-at-all-coincidentally by me can be found in the archives.) it does have its own games system: *Hârnmaster*. A couple of years back we saw a new edition of this game, and on the coattails of that release Columbia has been rewriting and re-releasing the core books of the system and re-arranging a lot of the background material as well. In the wake of *Hârnmaster: Magic* and *Hârnmaster: Religion*, we now get *Barbarians*.

The half-a-dozen "civilized" human kingdoms on the island not only have to share it with the dwarven and elven kingdoms but also with eighteen "barbarian" nations. These people live in the forests, wastes and wildlands between the clearings of the feudal nations, and on some of the many smaller islands that surround the main island of Hârn itself. They are nomadic and technologically primitive compared with their more settled neighbors, but they are a diverse and fascinating bunch, each with their own history, mythology and culture, all of which are detailed extensively here. The book gives you a brief generic introduction to adventuring among the barbarian tribes and then goes on to detail each tribe, with descriptions ranging from a couple of pages to half a dozen. They range from the tiny and degraded Kabloqui tribe to the mighty Kubora who have conquered one of the "civilized" nations in the past (and threaten to do it again if they ever manage to unite), and from the pacifist Bujoc to the berserker Tulwyn tribe. Here you can find out which tribes are matriarchal and which regard women as mere animals, which prefers to bring their foes down with poisoned arrows from ambush and which prefers to charge forward screaming like madmen and wearing no armor. You get details of tribal taboos, myths and legends, outlines of relationships with "civilized" people and the wars each tribe has to fight with the inhuman Gargun.

Much of this material has appeared before in the Kingdom modules that detail the feudal lands of Hârn. There is also a lot of new material; the information in the introduction (which gives overall details of how the barbarians share the land with their neighbors), how the barbarians survive by hunting and gathering, how to generate barbarian characters for *Hârnmaster*, some suggestions for campaigns set among the tribes, and overall details of their religious practices. In addition, for each tribe there is a list of "invocations" that their shamans can perform; these are compatible with the material in *Hârnmaster: Religion*. Since the Kingdom modules are in the process of being re-arranged and re-released this is certainly the only place that a newcomer to Hârn can get hold of this material and I think it is also worthwhile for the long-term Hârnic enthusiast, given the extra material and the improvement on the quality of printing and presentation from the earlier editions.

My only criticisms are that I would have liked to see the addition of "adventure seeds" for each culture. Something like this is attempted very briefly in the introduction, but I would have preferred to see a paragraph or so added to the individual tribe outlines, describing perhaps two ways of using the tribe in an adventure -- one for players cast as tribe

members and one using the tribe as NPC encounters for a "civilized" party. Columbia has done this sort of thing before, most successfully in their "Common Knowledge" sequence of outline adventures, which they will hopefully also get around to making more available to an admiring public.

-- *Michael Cule*

Pyramid Review

Shadow War (for Kindred of the East)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by Edward MacGregor and Bryant Durrell

104 Pages, $15.95

Shadow War, White Wolf's third supplement for the *Kindred of the East* offshoot of *Vampire: the Masquerade*, suffers from a sort of literary schizophrenia. Buying it was really a leap of faith, because I had no idea what I was going to get. Reading the back cover gave me the impression that I was purchasing a strange hybrid of *World of Darkness: Combat*, *California by Night*, and *Kuei-jin Politics for Dummies*.

The fairly typical "How to use this book" introduction, with its chapter by chapter summary was, thankfully, quick to address this problem. The first three chapters of *Shadow War* cover inter-Cathayan warfare, including both the formal wars waged by elders against each other, and the "Underground War" waged by younger Kuei-Jin (the Bamboo Princes) against the ruling Mandarins. Chapters four and five detail "Scarlet Screens" (mortal fronts for Kuei-Jin) and Kuei-Jin activity in California respectively. Unfortunately, little effort has been made to incorporate the final two chapters into the theme of the book as a whole, and they seem tacked on to the end more because they have nowhere better to be than because they really belong here.

Chapter one, Twilight War, details formal, non-lethal conflict between a pair of Kuei-Jin. The first half of the chapter is history, fleshing out existing cosmology and highlighting conflict between Wan Xian. While this is interesting, it is horribly over-written, and not all that useful. The second part contains a surprisingly short section on how one actually conducts a Twilight War, including a region by region breakdown of the details. This section is more useful than the preceding one, but very short. It should have been given more space, perhaps at the expense of the history section.

Chapter two deals with more serious conflicts: Midnight Wars. This chapter is interesting mostly for its flavor text, which is excellent. The section on the (lowercase r) rituals preceding a Midnight War is too long and fairly boring (these particular rituals being very similar to both Twilight War rituals and rituals from other books in the line), and the section on the various tactics involved isn't much better, offering little in the way of innovative or even neat tricks of warfare. Still, this chapter is a better read than the first.

Chapter three ("Underground War") looks at the conflicts between the young and old of Kuei-Jin society, and specifically at the "Bamboo Princes;" a society of Running Monkeys (young Kuei-Jin) trying to pull Cathayan society, kicking and screaming if necessary, into the 21st century. This is probably the best chapter in the book, as the writing is generally better (and the vignettes continue to be excellent), and the material more immediately applicable to a "basic" Kindred of the East campaign. Of particular note is a (mechanic-less) section on maximizing the potential of low-powered disciplines (including such gems as detaching an arm, Level One Flesh Shintai, and leaving it with a grenade in the trunk of an Mandarin's car). Again, though, this section is painfully short (covering less than two pages).

Chapter four is on Kuei-Jin mortal ties, known as Scarlet Screens. This chapter, unfortunately, is little more than a regurgitation of any one of the *Year of the Ally* books, with a slight, and I mean very slight, eastern tinge. And the promised section on incorporating Scarlet Screens into war doesn't make an appearance. This being said, the material is generally good, and a Storyteller who doesn't own any of the Year of the Ally books will find this chapter fairly useful.

Chapter five ("Crimson War") details the Kuei-Jin "Great Leap Outwards" into California. As a whole, this chapter will be of little use to most *KoE* Storytellers, except as a possible plot hook, but does have the potential to add another level of conflict to an existing World of Darkness campaign set in San Francisco or Los Angeles (there is even a section on how various other Prodigals are affected by the move, although it is well hidden in a discussion of the Spirit Realms). This chapter also contains a section on Kuei-Jin activity elsewhere in the world which could be of some use. For some reason, though, there is no mention of Africa in this section.

Content aside, *Shadow War* is a high quality production, even for White Wolf. The art, while sparse, is good, and the editing is excellent. The layout flaws which have plagued the company in recent times don't make an appearance, with one or two minor exceptions. The writing is also generally reasonable (with the exception of the aforementioned problem of over-writing), and the vignettes in this book are excellent reads.

There's a lot of good material in *Shadow War*, but it is cleverly hidden amidst loads of mostly useless information. It's not a bad buy, per se, but be prepared to spend a bit of time mining it for the good stuff hidden within.

-- Ryan Elias

Pyramid Pick

Slavers (for AD&D)

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Sean K Reynolds & Chris Pramas

128 pages, $18.95

One of my fondest role-playing memories is playing the original AD&D *Slavelords* series of modules (A1-A4) with my brother as DM. It was during this campaign that my all-time favorite character, a Halfling thief named Joshua Lyracon, came into his own. With that campaign still in my memory (and the original modules safely "borrowed" from my brother and in my bookshelf), I was thrilled when I recently went to my comic book store and found one of TSR's new releases: *Slavers*.

Strangely enough, *Slavers* in not part of TSR's Silver Anniversary Return to . . . line, even though the Slavelords series, originally published in 1980-81, certainly satisfies their criteria of being part of the shared history of many long-time D&D players. It is, however, better than the aforementioned "nostalgia" products that I have seen.

Slavers is a **World of Greyhawk** campaign adventure for 4th to 5th level characters, although adjusting the difficulty level requires little additional work. As with TSR's other nostalgia products, *Slavers* is fully self-contained; familiarity with the old modules is not necessary to fully enjoy or utilize *Slavers*. However, the new adventure *is* full of references to the originals, including locations, events and NPCs, making it a lot more enjoyable for fans of the classic modules.

Slavers is set ten years after the Slavelords' city of Suderham was consumed by a volcano in the climax of *A4: In the Dungeons of the Slavelords*. After a decade of peace the trademark yellow sails of the Slavelords' ships have returned to the Wild Coast and the Pomarj in the World of Greyhawk. Led by a remnant of the original Slavelords, the Slavers are back in force, along with a staggering number of allies, potential allies and even enemies.

Figuring out what the new plot involving the Slavelords *is* will take the reader a bit of work. This is largely because the story is extremely flexible. *Slavers* is a detailed and imaginative book of locations and characters, loosely tied together by several different antagonists and their agendas. The first chapter, entitled "Dungeon Master's Notes," provides a "Suggested Adventure Outline" which is quite useful if the DM wants a more straightforward, point-A-to-point-B adventure. But with preparation (and a healthy supply of sticky notes) a DM can let the players call the shots about where they go and what parts of the conspiracy they uncover. The players can even go off on tangents that have little or nothing to do with the overall plot, a fact that can be easily justified as the Slavelords' manipulations to divert attention from their operations.

In the "official" history, three Slavelords and at least two of their lieutenants survived the original story line. The high priest, the half-orc assassin and the evil monk from *In the Dungeons of the Slavelords* have rejoined a decade after their defeat and have reorganized the Slavers. While the half-orc has become the warlord of a massive humanoid army along the Wild Coast, the monk has organized pirates in Woolly Bay and the priest has begun to spread his Earth Dragon Cult throughout the region. Meanwhile, the Slavers' disguised ships kidnap people throughout the waterways in the vicinity of Greyhawk, either selling them to the humanoids or other evil humans or brainwashing them with drugs and priestly magic to create a slave army.

The Slavers maintain several outposts throughout the region, several of which the adventurers must discover and

eliminate in order to uncover the underlying plot. Eventually the characters should find clues to the location of the new Slavelords' secret base of operations, at which time they will (hopefully) act accordingly. They will, however, have to cross a vast region controlled by a humanoid empire to get there. In the meantime they will not only face Slavers and the humanoids but also pirates, city guardsmen, corrupt (or misguided) politicians, the militaries of Greyhawk and other nations and even other adventurers.

Slavers is a far cry from the simple dungeon crawl of the original adventures, although that element is certainly present for players and DMs who want it. In fact, several of the minor Slaver bases are much like the Undercity and Stockade from *A1* and *A2*. However, much of the action in *Slavers* involves overland travel, city and town adventures, political intrigue and quite a lot of ocean-going adventure and ship-to-ship combat and boarding actions (a well-written abbreviated version of the rules from *Of Ships and the Sea* is provided with *Slavers*, but that supplement is still recommended). While there is plenty of action to go around, not all of the scenarios are combat oriented. In fact, there is a wonderful suggested encounter where possession of a captured slave ship will result in the ship getting impounded and the PCs being arrested and conscripted into a city's militia as penance for their "crime." The group's hackmasters should love that!

One of the more interesting NPCs from the story is the evil Elf Markessa. Fans may remember her as the fighter/magic user in charge of the operation in *A2: Secret of the Slaver's Stockade*. Markessa was a Dr. Moreau sort of wacko who conducted foul experiments with cosmetic surgery and shape-changing, producing hideous abominations and a few successful enhanced beings. Slavers takes her story a step further. Markessa has spent the intervening years perfecting her craft, especially with regard to her pet project, creating brainwashed duplicates of herself from other Elven women -— usually against their will. Several of these duplicates —- Markessa the Black, Markessa the Gold, etc. —- run some of the Slavers' minor operations.

The structure of *Slavers* could not be more different from its predecessors. Where the tournament design of the original series herded players around even more blatantly than other *D&D* modules of the era (amazingly enough), *Slavers* does the opposite. Rather than set a beginning and an end with a few places to stop in between, *Slavers* is an entire campaign setting. There are nearly a dozen different suggestions for how to get the players initially involved in the story, none of which include plopping them down on the steps of a ruined temple, pointing them at the doors and commanding, "Hack!" as it effectively did in A1. In fact, some of the suggested beginnings are so seemingly unrelated to the larger picture that a good DM could spring this adventure on his or her players without them realizing who the ultimate antagonists are until they are fully embroiled in the plot.

Each chapter also includes a sizable section of "further adventures," adventure seeds that will allow a creative DM to make the campaign as large as he/she could possibly want. There are even a number of well-developed connections and crossovers to other *Greyhawk* modules, including *The Star Cairns* and the classic *Ghost Tower of Inverness*.

Slavers is a thorough campaign supplement, providing detailed information on the World of Greyhawk's Pomarj and Wild Coast regions. If you play in Greyhawk this is a wonderful thing, but it can prove cumbersome if you intend to work *Slavers* into a different campaign world. However, the cities and locations of *Slavers* are rich and well described, providing plenty of fodder to fill out your own world, if you are willing to do the work.

A common complaint about the other nostalgia modules from Wizards of the Coast has been the ratio of their cost to their content. At $12.95 for 64 pages each, the *White Plume Mountain* and *Keep on the Borderlands Return to . . .* books weren't a lot of bang for the buck. This is not a problem with *Slavers*. Not only do you get 128 pages for $18.95, those 128 pages are dense. The publishers used what appears to be a 9-point font (rather than the apparent 10-point for *RTWPM*), meaning significantly more words per page. The art is kept to a relative minimum, leaving more room for text, but when they use artwork, they use it well. Illustrations consistently reflect the text with impressive accuracy. Most of the pictures are those of the characters and locations players are likely to see, and they are all very well drawn. This is certainly a welcome contrast to the art from the original series, if you can remember how bad some of that was.

If *Slavers* has a weakness, it is an organizational one. The structure of the book is mostly pretty good, divided as it is into sections related to different locations in the region. However, there is no master list of antagonists, nor is there an index of any sort. As a consequence, finding the stats for a specific Slavelord -- Markessa, for instance -- is an

annoying exercise in hunting and gathering, further complicated by the fact that there are some half a dozen separate "Markessas" in the book. However, if you buy the module with the intention of converting it to a different system, as I did, you will be transferring all such information to separate sheets anyway, so this shouldn't be a huge problem. If you want to run the module as is, I recommend using brightly colored sticky notes to mark key locations in the book as well as copious notes.

All in all, *Slavers* is an exceedingly well-made gaming product. If you want to pick up an adventure to slap together for your group next weekend, *Slavers* is not your best bet -- you'll only make the rest of your week a living nightmare. But if you want a wealth of information about establishing or expanding a long-term campaign, and are willing to spend some time familiarizing yourself with it, this book is a treasure trove.

In fact, *Slavers* makes me wish my brother still Dungeon Mastered. I feel the need to bring Joshua out of retirement.

--Robert Neal Byles

That Sinking Feeling: Atlantis Lost and Found

"What lands may have been thickly populated for untold ages, and subsequently have disappeared and left no sign above the waters, it is of course impossible for us to say; but unless we are to make the wholly unjustifiable assumption that no dry land rose elsewhere when our present dry land sank, there must be half-a-dozen Atlantises beneath the waves of the various oceans of the world."
-- T. H. Huxley, *Methods and Results of Ethnology* (1865)

Boy, you lose one measly continent and people just won't let you forget about it. Ever since 355 B.C. (or 1450 or 8498 or 9564 or 10,540 or 800,000 B.C.), people have been dredging up Atlantis from somewhere in the vasty deep and making it jump through romantic or philosophical or political hoops. No wonder it's turned kind of mean. And since it's the creepy, fascist, decadent, racist Atlantis deserving of its destruction by the gods that makes for better roleplaying material, that's the kind of Atlantis we'll go fishing for today through the many and multifarious Atlantises caught in the loosely-rigged nets of mysticism and dog-scholarship. Dive right in, the water's fine.

"This power came forth out of the Atlantic Sea, for in those days, the sea was navigable; and there was an island situated in front of the straits which you call the Pillars of Herakles; the island was larger than Libya and Asia together, and was the way to other islands. . . Now in this island of Atlantis there was a great and wonderful empire which had rule over the whole island and several others. . . "
-- Plato, *Timaios,* 24D

It shouldn't surprise anyone that Atlantis gets so mean, given that it was the brainchild of Plato, godfather of fascism. The *Timaios* and *Kritias,* the dialogues in which Plato told the story of Atlantis, serve a larger role as illustrations of the failure of democracy and the need for pure, ordered societies. (In fact, Atlantis' hubristic attempt to conquer the world is stopped only by a superior fascist state, Plato's idealized Republic of Athens.) Plato also wound up, somehow, as one of the fathers of Western mysticism thanks to his dismissal of the connection between the real and the perceived -- this comes back into the Atlantis legend sooner than the fascism does, in fact. It's pretty clear to anyone who's read Plato that he made the whole story up; the combination of the framing sequence of "Egyptian records" about a land "beyond the Pillars of Herakles" was the equivalent of "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away" to Classical Greek readers.

Some very ingenious people have tried to claim that Plato got Atlantis from real Egyptian records of Minoan Crete (which didn't sink) or Thera (which blew up and never had an empire), neither of which are beyond the Pillars of Herakles -- nor did the Egyptians have any records of either catastrophe, as far as we know. For coverage of these clever folks (as well as a myriad of others proposing Atlantises from Greenland to Nigeria to South Africa to Ceylon), it's well worth reading Richard Ellis' *Imagining Atlantis* and L. Sprague de Camp's *Lost Continents.* It's possible that Plato took the island from Homer's Ogygia or Schaeria, and the germ of the "sunken city" trope from the Greek city of Helike, which sank into the Gulf of Corinth twenty years before he wrote the *Timaios,* and the annihilating war from the catastrophe of the Peloponnesian War (during which a wave smashed up an Athenian fortress on the island of Atalantë). But it's most likely that he made it up, just like he made up the floating sky-islands in the *Phaidon,* where giants lived.

"At bottom every German has one foot in Atlantis, where he seeks a better Fatherland and a better patrimony. This double nature of the Germans, this faculty they have of splitting their personality which enables them to live in the real world and at the same time to project themselves into an imaginary world, is especially noticeable in Hitler and provides the key to his magical socialism."
-- Hermann Rauschning, *Conversations With Hitler*

But when you combine giants, protofascism, and Atlantis, you start cranking out Theosophy, and that's just what H.P. Blavatsky and her ilk did. Descended from the oviparous Third Race, the Lemurians, the Theosophical Atlanteans were just like people, only giants. (Heretically, Rudolf Steiner's Atlanteans could only learn by eidetic memory rather than true understanding.) They went through seven "subraces" from the black and "childlike" Rmoahals through the warlike Turanians, calving off the Aryans (true humanity) right about the fourth subrace. This gumbo led to a lot of

people finding the home of the Aryan race and Atlantis in the same place, from Mongolia (identified by the astronomer Jean Sylvain Bailly in 1779) to Spitsbergen (also identified by Bailly, hedging his bets). Karl Georg Zschaetzch, in his 1922 *Atlantis: Original Homeland of the Aryans,* made it explicit with his theory that Atlantis was sunk by a comet after its natives had mingled their blood with inferior slaves. (He also claimed to be descended from Zeus, spelled "Zschaetzsch" in the original Atlantean.) The engineer Otto Muck (inventor of the U-Boat snorkel and part of von Braun's V-2 team at Peenemünde) proposed a similar asteroid impact off Puerto Rico in 8498 B.C. vaporizing a floating continent in *The Secret of Atlantis.* Muck drew much of his supporting evidence from an oceanographic expedition under Dr. Albert Merz, which gathered data in 1925-1927 during the voyage of the (ahem) *Meteor* in the South Atlantic. Speaking of coincidental naming and Germans in the South Atlantic, the cruiser *Atlantis* (full of Professor Muck's Atlantean secret technology, no doubt) raided Allied commerce throughout the Antarctic seas in 1939-1941 (resupplying the Antarctic Space Nazi airfields in Neuschwabenland -- another Atlantis, by the by) until she was sunk on November 22, 1941.

"In our days there can no main or other island be found to be judged to be parcel of this Atlantis, than those western islands, which bear now the name of America."
-- Sir Humphrey Gilbert and George Gascoigne, *A Course of Discoverie For A New Passage To Cathay* (1576)

That, of course, was because the Germans had tangled with the true Atlantis, which is, of course, America. On the other hand, in 1805 Sir Francis Wilford said that Atlantis was Britain -- but then he also said that Palestine was Britain. (In 1570, Jean de Serres claimed that Palestine was Atlantis.) William Blake split the difference and said that Atlantis was a spiritual country combining the best of both Albion and America. I've got to admit that if you're looking for a continent on the other side of the Pillars of Herakles, America is a good one, although its pestiferous failure to sink derails that theory. It didn't derail Elizabethan magus John Dee, who repeatedly referred to America as Atlantis (attempting an enchanted naming?), believing that Plato's city only sank in part of the continent.

Dee favored the Northwest Passage or the Verazzano Sea (the great inland sea from the Hudson River to California); others selected the West Indies, Mexico, the Yucatan, and so forth. (In *Atlantis in Wisconsin,* Frank Joseph puts it underneath Rock Lake in the Badger State.) I've covered the interest of Dee and Raleigh in America elsewhere, but it's interesting that in *The Tempest,* set on a magical island, Shakespeare specifically mentions Bermuda (an Atlantic island), dead Indians, a "brave new world" and a philosophical utopia, and completes it all by having the wizard duke Prospero (an echo of the sorceror-kings of Atlantis, as well as of Atlantis-hunter Dee) "drown" his book "deeper than ever did plummet sound," a clear echo of lost magical knowledge under water. Where Shakespeare alludes, of course, his would-be alter ego and conspiracy fave Sir Francis Bacon comes right out and tells the tale of a scientific utopia in the *New Atlantis,* which he had published in 1627, the year after his death. Unless, of course, he faked his death and snuck off to the old Atlantis, which he said was obviously America.

"This description suggests all the characteristics of an Atlantean city, with moats, tunnels, causeways, and unending lights. Whether the race now occupying them are descendants of a helot nation, aeons ago, ruled over by the ancient white kings and fair gods of old Brazil, or the posterity of the old Hy-Brazilian Atlanteans long gone savage. . . must for the time, remain a moot point."
-- Harold T. Wilkins, *Secret Cities of Old South America* (1952)

Or, it might have been one continent off: South America has been in the Atlantis running ever since Sebastian Münster labeled it "insula Atlantica" on his 1540 world map. Raleigh's El Dorado is an Atlantean holdover, of course, as are the various other lost cities (full of "white gods") spangled through the rain forest including Akakor of the six-fingered Nazis. These places' resolute refusal to sink into the ocean doesn't disqualify them, though. (In kind of an Atlantis-in-reverse, travelers since before Raleigh have placed phantom oceans in South America that vanish from maps to be replaced with land.) J.M. Allen's recent *Atlantis: the Andes Solution* announces that Atlantis is in the Bolivian altiplano, which is about as unsunken a continent as you can get. He announces that it lies beneath Lake Poopo, and drowned during a Noachian rainstorm, and that its refugees became the Aztecs and the Philistines -- even Bolivian Atlanteans turn out to be bad news, it seems.

"Indeed, given the various American Indian legends and images of the gods weeping for their 'sunken Red Land,' the multiple mythical references to space as a vast ocean, and numerous occult connections, it is likely that Mars was the

original 'island' of Atlantis that 'sank beneath the waves,' with the name later applied to any global catastrophe which followed on our own world."
-- Bruce Rux, *Architects of the Underworld*

The Philistines, of course, worshiped Dagon, the half-man, half-fish-god so beloved of H.P. Lovecraft and so reminiscent of all those merman type Atlantises from Aquaman to Arion to Prince Namor. (All of whom seem to have a real bone to pick with the "surface world" -- in an interesting echo of Platonic criticism of the superficial nature of modern man.) And we all know that half-fish gods are actually [Nommo aliens](#) from Sirius, right? Sirius must be Atlantis, then, unless it's Mars (which had a big flood, albeit some eons ago) or Venus (which, like El Dorado, used to have an imaginary ocean but lost it later). What we really learn from all this, then, is that Atlantis is everywhere (most likely hidden behind a primo Theosophist "vibrational barrier" or lurking beneath those all-concealing waves). And that it's really, really mean. Keep watching the seas!

Taking a Break from Saving the World

I feel sorry for the crew of the Enterprise. Ever since they moved to the big screen, they haven't had a vacation.

(And, really, I can be talking about either crew. . . though, since the original crew has had more movies so far, they're more of a case study.)

I mean, if you watch the *Star Trek* TV shows, you realize that, every once in a while, the crew gets to relax. Whether it's on a pleasure planet with a big fakey rabbit, or a return to Earth to chat with family after getting assimilated, there were many episodes where the stakes weren't that high, where the crew could talk with each other, and things were generally calm.

But the *Star Trek* movies were different. Once they moved to the big screen, suddenly everything became a big deal. Here's some statistics to think about if you're a member of the Enterprise crew, and you're in a movie:

- 33% of the time the Earth will be placed in immediate catastrophic peril.
- 33% of the time you will travel *through* time.
- 22% of the time the Enterprise will be destroyed.
- 55% of the time you will violate *direct* Federation orders, placing your career in danger.
- 22% of the time a member of the bridge crew will die.
- 11% of the time your life will be in the hands of Cameron from *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*.

We're talking cataclysmic events here!

Which, I believe, is one of the reasons the *Star Trek* movies (and, to a lesser extent, the novels) suffer compared to the series. There seems to be the impression (which may be correct) that, to justify the size and expense of a movie or novel, the story needs to be. . . well, Earth-shattering.

(Random thought: For those of you who collect the *Original Series* novels, or peruse the *Original Series* novel section of your Barnes & Nobles, notice how many of the blurbs at the top of the novel fit the pattern of "Blah blah blah blah interstellar war!" or something equally dramatic.)

The problem with Earth-shattering events is that, well, they get boring. The act of saving all of creation doesn't *mean* as much if you do it every week; downtime is important to show who you are when you're not a world-saver.

Which, a mere 376 words later, brings me to the point of this article: Downtime is important.

There are many game worlds where it's expected that PCs do the epic; super-heroic campaigns, high fantasy worlds, and space opera all expect PCs to do their part when it comes time to save the universe. But, really, if that's all you do, it can get old pretty fast.

If you're in an RPG campaign with humans or human-like beings, I recommend, as a player and a GM, that you take in-game breaks every so often. These are especially appropriate after big adventures; if you've spent a month saving the world, a session to take a breath and reflect is appropriate.

Gamemasters, if your players have spent five adventures keeping the Cube Cosmique out of the hands of Mr. Doom, an adventure where everyone goes to Disney World might be in order. If the last adventure culminated with the death of a major NPC (or PC!), an adventure dealing with the personal ramifications of that demise may make the death even more poignant. Inconsequential city festivals, "day in the life" adventures, surprise birthday parties, personal relationships: all of the things that break up the monotony of the daily grind can also break up an earth-shattering tedium.

Players, make sure your characters exist outside of world-saving entities. If your character wasn't saving the world,

what would s/he be *doing* with that day off? If you want to "relax" in-character, talk to your GM about what you'd want to do. . . mundane goals, interests, and subplots all make characters more *real*, and can help flesh out your alter-ego's personality.

The Empire Strikes Back is many people's favorite *Star Wars* movie; I suspect one of the reasons is because there isn't an earth-shattering plot. The Good Guys could very well fail, and it wouldn't mean the end of everything. (Heck, the Good Guys *did* very well fail.) My favorite comic issues tend to be the ones right after the epic storyline, where everyone's sitting around going, "Whew! The Eastern seaboard's safe; let's go get ice cream!" The quiet moments make the loud moments louder.

So the next time the red shirts beg for shore leave, consider letting them go for a while. The ones that survive will thank you.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Labyrinth of Madness**, p. 48 (and perhaps the toughest **AD&D** adventure TSR ever published)

(one star) "**No Reaction/Blasé:** This individual has nerves of steel or the brains of a cactus. She displays absolutely no reaction to the Garou's appearance. If spoken to, she responds as if she sees this sort of thing every day. Nothing new here, and certainly nothing worth fretting about."

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

[Click here for the Flash animated version!](#)

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Down in the Digs

by Andrew Frades

Art by Rogerio Vilela and Philip Reed, and ArtToday

The war between the two celestial forces is a cold war of information and covert action. Boston, unlike Austin, is an excellent example of this move and counter move. So far the balance of power has been fairly even, though lately the efforts of the demons have begun to give them an advantage, and the angels are worried.

On the demonic side stands Japhet, an Impudite Captain of the War, and de-facto commander of the local demonic forces. Her role is that of Andrea Carnegie, an organized crime boss and consummate planner. She has unified her side in Boston and the surrounding suburbs and rules them with an iron fist. She has spent a great deal of time thinking and planning for the demise of both of Boston's protectors and fears a powerful heavenly response if the World Trade Center falls.

On the angelic side stand two stalwart guardians of Heaven: Rimmiel, A Seraph Master of Trade and Worded Senechal of the World Trade Center, and Zaccai, A Malakite Vassal of the Sword and protector of the children of Boston. The two angels communicate regularly though they rarely work in concert, having such different views on the War. It is through communication that the two delegate responsibilities based upon who is more capable of handling the response.

To this volatile celestial mix is added a new flavor, Pelon, A Calabite of Fire, who is following in the footsteps of his unknowing mentor, Furfur, the newly crowned Demon Prince of Hardcore (see *__Night Music__*). Pelon is not a Renegade, but is working without the knowledge of his Superior, or anyone else for that matter. The Calabite is fairly subtle and has spent some time assessing the situation in Boston. His plan is simple: cut off all of the traffic routes into the World Trade Center through a series of accidents, and then, when the Tether is weakened, cut the power and communication trunk that runs into Boston's south end. He hopes that this will shut down the flow of heavenly essence and collapse the Tether. He is probably correct.

Background Locations

The World Trade Center

The most active conference and convention center in North America is in Boston: The World Trade Center. The Center itself sits on a long pier on the waterfront that extends off of Boston's south side across from Logan International Airport. The Center is easy to get to from anywhere in the Boston area as it is just off of the Central Artery, I-93, and the Mass Pike, I-90.

The Center has achieved its number one status due to the work of one angel, Rimmiel, a Seraph of Trade. She took what was once just one of many trade centers and built it into a major force for trade in the area and across all of America. Besides being a convention center the building is also home to some of the best technology available for

high-speed money transactions and communication across the world. The Center has direct satellite and ground based communications access to hundreds of other sites and is a major player in the world economic community with billions of dollars flowing through its networks each year.

The importance of this site to world trade has allowed Marc to stabilize a Tether here and, in gratitude for her service, he awarded Rimmiel the duty of Senechal.

The "Big Dig"

Boston's Central Artery and Tunnel (C/AT) project is the largest, and most expensive, road construction project in the United States today. Consisting of the reconstruction of many miles of eleven story tall roadways along I-93 (north to south) in Boston and a three mile extension of I-90 (east to west); it is not surprising that the project is one hundred percent over the original projected budget. The price continues to skyrocket with little end in sight. It has caused no end to the traffic trouble into and out of the city, and is considered a public embarrassment. Many consider the "Big Dig" to be nothing but a very large hole that is designed to contain and destroy money a million dollars at a time. All this is all done without the designs of a single demon.

This has brought no shame to Japhet, the highest-ranking demon in the area. Instead it has brought nothing but praise for the wonderful backdrop of espionage, corruption, and intrigue that the demon has sponsored in the city without the loss of a single human life. Japhet is proud of the people of Boston.

South Station and Chinatown

South Station is one of two major public transit points in and around the city of Boston (the other being North Station). It is also one of the best ways to connect directly into Boston's south side via bus or by the T (Boston's system of trains that travel within the city and to many of the outlying suburbs).

The station itself is on the edge of Boston's Chinatown, which is small compared to those in other cities, but is still quite active. The district contains many of the stereotypical elements of any Chinatown. Unfortunately, this particular area can also be one of the most dangerous areas of Boston proper once the sun goes down.

The Ted Williams Tunnel

The tunnel, one of three that come across Boston's Inner Harbor, is the only one that leads directly from Logan International Airport to the south side. At one time it was only open to commercial traffic, but congestion in the city has caused the tunnel to be opened to all traffic during peak hours. The tunnel itself is over a mile long and has multiple lanes in each direction.

Saint Joseph's Church

Saint Joseph's in Boston's West End was intended to be a Unitarian church that was built to be a house of worship for the best and brightest of Boston society. This was not to be, as a rush of immigration into Boston from Ireland during the potato famine caused a massive explosion of population around the church and drove high society away. The Catholic Diocese of the time saw an opportunity and purchased the beautiful brick and stone building at a fraction of its cost, paying nearly $27,000 over one hundred and fifty years ago. The church is nestled in a square mile that contains not one but two hospitals, and has become a stabilizing influence in what could have been a bad part of town but is not. The ministry of the church has always been active in local projects and, following the lead of the Archdiocese of Boston, has become active in local politics as well. The saying that all politics is local was probably first said in Massachusetts, and the Catholic Church follows the edict well.

The church is also home to Zaccai, a Malakim of the Sword, in his role as one of the priests, Father Zachary Morrison. The Father is extremely active in many of the church's neighborhood programs, taking a special focus on the children. He is a powerful figure and symbol to the people of the area, who enjoy his strong countenance and unwavering smile.

The Father has also been seen to personally drive off any of a number of potential hazards to the area, including drug dealers, pimps, and other criminal elements. This is not to say that there is no crime in the West End, it is just understood that harming the children of Father Morrison is a bad idea.

Adventure Timeline

Monday 9 a.m. It all begins with a phone call

Arnold Becker, a foreman at the south side C/AT construction site, picks up the diagrams for the underground power grid in the new area of construction. He speaks with Martha Williams, one of the clerks, and signs for the copies of the city documents. These documents are actually forgeries planted by Pelon just over a week ago. He has been waiting for a call from Fredrick Sturgeon, another clerk, but one that he has bribed and threatened. Fredrick was instructed to call Pelon when copies of these particular documents leave the Department of Public Works.

Monday 10 a.m. Inciting a riot

After getting the call from Fredrick, Pelon leaves his small apartment outside the city to find some of Boston's less savory element. He travels to Chinatown and finds a gang of Asian-American youths. He gets them to agree to harass the users of South Station and begin to cut off traffic to the south side. In return, Pelon provides them with the information that when the power gets shut off the next morning, the security system at Kischel's (a local south side gem distributor) will shut down. Unfortunately for Pelon, one of the gang's youth is a Catholic and his family is a member of Saint Joseph's.

Monday 1 p.m. Seeing Father Morrison

Having had a change of heart, Tommy Tseng arrives at Saint Joseph's and visits with Father Morrison. He tells the Father everything that he knows about the gem merchant and the other planned activities of the gang. Zaccai plans on showing up at Kischel's gem distributors the next morning to have a little talk with the Chinatown youth.

Monday 10 p.m. A little sabotage goes a long way

Pelon uses his resonance to destroy the engine governor for the Ted Williams Tunnel ventilation system. He correctly assumes that the fan will spin out of control when the tunnel's carbon monoxide levels reach their highest, during rush hour. He knows that if this happens that the circulation system will overheat and shut down, causing the necessity of a tunnel closing.

Tuesday 1 a.m. Tying loose ends

Pelon travels to the home of Fredrick Sturgeon and ends the poor public servant's life. This creates a good-sized disturbance in the Symphony that could easily be noticed by wandering PCs.

Tuesday 7 a.m. The plan begins to come together

As rush hour reaches its peak, a number of the circulation fans for the Ted Williams Tunnel over-rotate, wrecking many sensitive mechanical systems. The tunnel is quickly shut down due to dangerous levels of monoxides and all traffic is diverted to other routes.

Tuesday 8 a.m. And then the lights go out

Arnold Becker orders digging around the south side C/AT construction site in an area reportedly free of underground power lines. This information, fed to him from false documents, is incorrect and a backhoe rips open one of the main

power lines into Boston's south side.

The power goes out in the World Trade Center, Kischel's gem distributors and many other businesses in the area. The backup power generators in the World Trade Center keep the Tether's business systems up for some time, but some key systems begin to shut down near the end of the two hours it takes Public Service to repair the power line.

Rimmiel is concerned and suspects a demonic plot to harm the Tether. She begins planning a response to her belief of Japhet involvement. Japhet is no happier than Rimmiel and is also suspicious of demonic involvement not her own.

At this time Japhet or Rimmiel will call in extra help from PC favored servitors, if they have not already.

Wednesday 3 p.m. It goes from bad to worse

Two tunnel repair workers are trapped when a support for one of the circulation fans breaks loose. The support was due to be replaced soon and the stress placed on it by the breakdown proved to be too much. The workers are trapped in an access shaft and repair work on the tunnel is halted until they can be freed. Since the tunnel is one of the major sites of traffic incoming to the south side, its long-term shutdown might pose a continued problem for the Tether. Agents of Rimmiel or Japhet (or both) might be sent to help the workers and reopen the tunnel.

Wednesday 5 p.m. But Pelon isn't done yet

Pelon, ever resourceful, has planned another problem for traffic trying to reach the south side. He has watched the C/AT workers park their construction vehicles at the I-93 site for some days. One particular vehicle, a tall crane truck, has been parked in the same place for many days, and Pelon takes a chance. By using his resonance to subtly destroy the hard pack clay in the ground at the sight, he hopes to remove any stability in the ground. When the many ton machine is parked on the now-unstable ground, Pelon's gamble pays off.

The crane slowly sinks into the ground and topples on the upper deck of I-93. The upper deck buckles, cutting off traffic on it (northbound) and on the lower deck (southbound) due to stress fractures. Traffic in this area is diverted, causing many generic traffic problems throughout the city as well as cutting off one of the major roads that is used as a connector for the south side.

The collapse causes a great deal of Symphonic disturbance that could easily be detected by any celestial within about a mile.

Thursday 8 a.m. Pelon blows up the T

Pelon has made a large explosive charge and gives it to one of his Chinatown youth to plant in the T station close to the Trade Center. This will avoid disturbance and frees him to be in other places. Because the charge will go off just prior to rush hour, Pelon hopes to cause a maximum of trouble for the city and the south side.

Thursday 12 a.m. Pelon sets an explosive in the hole dug by Arnold Becker's workers the day before. It is set to go off in two hours.

Sneaking in and carefully placing a prepared explosive to destroy the main electrical trunk to the Trade Center is Pelon's coup de grace. By depleting the Center's power backup the day before he hopes that they will have had no time to get them fully back online. He is correct.

Thursday 1 p.m. Pelon sabotages the satellite uplink on the roof of the World Trade Center.

Satellite uplinks are not as sensitive as many people think, but can fairly easily be rendered useless to those with the right skills. Pelon has these skills and has set up a number of tight beam broadcasters around the area to interfere with the satellite traffic. This quickly renders the financial data useless.

Thursday 1:15 p.m. Pelon stands in the World Trade Center parking lot and watches, waiting for the finale.

Pelon waits drinking whiskey from a bottle wrapped in a paper bag and sitting on a car. He will talk to any angels (or demons) that arrive, but will not tell them how to stop what is going to happen even if threatened. He knows he is about to succeed and there is little they can do to stop him.

Running Down in the Digs

The important thing to remember is that Rimmiel and Japhet have been enemies for so long that they simply assume that the other is maneuvering, and send in forces. Though Japhet does suspect some demonic involvement, either side will have difficulty believing that the other is not responsible, somehow. Evidence pointing away from their long-time enemies will not be ignored, just reinterpreted to seem as if the enemy is crafty and plotting, which they are. Alternately, Japhet may want to take down whoever is working in Boston without her permission, there is a chain of command, and she will see that it is followed. This is important to play up as it is unlikely that Pelon, despite being rather tough, could take on an entire group of celestials and win.

Another thing to remember is that the PCs should be troubleshooters from one side of The War and the other side has called in reinforcements as well. Though it might be interesting to run the adventure with a mixed party, it is unlikely that they would all be called in to work together with the rampant mistrust and scheming going on in Boston.

Involving Your Players

Down in the Digs

Angels of Marc might be called in to help defend the Tether either by Rimmiel or by Marc himself.

Demons might be called in to help Japhet figure out what exactly is going on and put an end to it. Japhet wants to deliver the final blow to the Tether and angel that have been a thorn in her side for quite some time and will tolerate no upstart taking out her enemy simply for his own gain.

Angels of David, Dominic, Laurence, or Michael could easily be called in to deal with the new force of demonic activity in the Boston. This works particularly well if the angels have already been set up as "heavenly troubleshooters."

Demons of Fire might be called to find Pelon, who has gone missing. After the events in the "Demon Prince of Rock and Roll" (see *Night Music*), Belial is taking no chances.

Angels serving the more peaceful Archangels could easily be drawn into the web of confusion surrounding Boston's Chinatown, and the corruption of its children. This works particularly well for servitors of Christopher or Yves.

Demons serving Fate, Drugs or the War might be called in to help Japhet's organization in any of its aspects, and become involved in the events of this adventure.

Angels of Animals might get involved in defense of the New England Aquarium, home to many fish and marine mammals. Though the Aquarium is not on the south side it is just across the inner harbor from the Trade Center and some of the damage to the power grid could easily spill over leading to the potential destruction of thousands of ocean dwelling animals.

Demons of the Game, Dark Humor, and Factions might become interested in whomever is causing this turmoil. The

Game might want to recruit them, while Dark Humor and Factions might just want to shake their hand.

Angels and Demons serving Lightning or Technology respectively could be sent to one of the nations most technologically advanced colleges, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), and become involved from there.

Soldiers from either side might be working for either Zaccai or Japhet, and could easily become embroiled in the events surrounding the World Trade Center. This could also work for Celestials from either side who could be called in to help.

Agents of Heaven
The Major Players

RIMMIEL, SENESCHAL OF THE WORLD TRADE CENTER
Seraph Master of Trade

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 7	Agility 9
Ethereal Forces - 5	Intelligence 12	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 5	Will 10	Perception 10

Vessel: Human/4 (adult female), Charisma +1

Role: Janine Mallory (Director of Operations/6, Status/6)

Skills: Computer Operation/3, Detect Lies/4, Dodge/3, Emote/3, Fast-Talk/6, Knowledge (Business/6, Finance/6), Languages (English/3, Finish/3, French/3, German/3, and Swedish/3), Savoir-Faire/4, Tracking/6 (Paper Trails)

Songs: Charm (Corporeal/3, Ethereal/3, Celestial/3), Harmony (Ethereal/4), Shields (Corporeal/2, Ethereal/4, Celestial/3), Tongues (Corporeal/5, Ethereal/3, Celestial/3)

Attunements: Divine Contract, Elohite of Trade, Master of Finances, Seraph of Trade

Rimmiel acts as the Director of Operations for the entire World Trade Center in Boston. She is a shrewd business woman and has led the center to be the most profitable and active of all the World Trade Centers in North America. She is a micro-manager and no one is surprised to see her involved in any aspect of the day to day business of the center. Her vessel is a handsome woman in her late thirties with short dark hair who is never seen out of her business attire.

She is, however, having a bit of trouble with the problems that have been caused by the local construction. She is in a quandary about what, exactly, to do. She suspects that the local heavy hitters from the other side, a demon of the War whom she has never met directly, is behind the power and communication outages, but she does not have any proof. Every solution that she has come up with has failed, and she knows that it is time to get some help before any permanent damage is done.

ZACCAI, MALAKITE VASSAL OF THE SWORD

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 10	Agility 6
Ethereal Forces - 2	Intelligence 5	Precision 3
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 5	Perception 7

Vessel: Human/2 (adult male)

Role: Zachary Morrison (Catholic Priest/4, Status/4)

Skills: Detect Lies/3, Dodge/2, Emote/4, Knowledge/4 (Boston), Large Weapon/2 (sword), Tactics/3, Throwing/2

Songs: Tongues (Corporeal/3)

Attunements: Malakite of the Sword, Vassal of the Sword

Artifacts: the crucifix sword (power +9, permanent Blade Blessing of Laurence and Scabbard Attunements, double the check digit for damage against creatures of evil)

Rite: Successfully defend an innocent person without the use of violence

Oaths: grant all requests for sanctuary, never surrender in a fight or allow yourself to be captured by the armies of Lucifer, defend the innocent, suffer no evil to live while it is your choice

Father Zachary Morrison is sixty years old and shows no sign of slowing despite his advancing age, wrinkles, and gray hair. He has been a staple of Saint Joseph's Church in Boston's West End for thirty years, and has earned a place of respect both within the church and within the surrounding community. He can often be seen on the athletic court that adjoins the neighboring youth house playing basketball, hopscotch, dodgeball, or just talking to the children. He has become rather fond of the children of the church and has correctly come to believe that they are the future. Many of the youth that the Father has worked with have gone on to further their education and become productive and successful members of society. Father Zachary is proud of each and every one of them, remembering each of their names and perhaps even a short story about their life years ago. He has been know to give sermons on Sunday, but usually defers this duty to younger members of the church staff preferring his time spent on other duties.

Zaccai is also the commander of the forces of God for the Boston area and he knows of most of the Soldiers and angels within his territory. As such, he is well aware of the activities of Julie Hamilton and often finds the time to seek her out and have a short chat. He would willingly help her with any problem she might encounter, especially if involved thwarting the plans of demons or helping the innocent youth of Boston.

Agents of Hell
The Major Players

JAPHET, IMPUDITE CAPTAIN OF THE WAR

Corporeal Forces - 3	Strength 4	Agility 8
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 8	Precision 8
Celestial Forces - 5	Will 12	Perception 8

Vessel: Human/4 (adult female), Sex Appeal +2

Role: Andrea Carnegie (Crime Lord/6, Status/5)

Skills: Computer Operation/4, Detect Lies/3, Dodge/6, Emote/3, Fast-Talk/6, Fighting/3, Knowledge (Boston/6, organized crime/6), Move Silently/4, Ranged Weapon/6 (pistol), Savoir-Faire/2

Songs: Acid/5, Projection (Corporeal/5), Thunder/5

Attunements: Art of Combat, Captain of the Infernal Armies, Impudite of the War, State of Ophis

Japhet has been active on the corporeal plane for some time and is the commander of all of Baal's armies in the Boston area. She is a competent servitor of the War and is every bit the demonic captain of the underworld with a tip of her shapely hat to the Lord of Lust.

Japhet is a bit worried about the recent events surrounding the World Trade Center. Though Rimmiel and Japhet have been adversaries for some years, Japhet is not behind the sabotage and this has the demon worried. She is certain that another demon is active in the area and has begun to work within the organizations of the police and the Underworld to find out who. So far she has had no luck and would be most appreciative to anyone who could point out the demon responsible. It does not look good for a demon at Japhet's level to be unaware of what is going on in her zone of command.

PELON, CALABITE OF FIRE

Corporeal Forces - 4	Strength 12	Agility 4

Ethereal Forces - 4   Intelligence 9   Precision 7

Celestial Forces - 4   Will 11   Perception 5

Vessel: Human/3 (adult male), Rat/1 (adult rat)

Skills: Chemistry/5, Computer Operation/3, Electronics/5, Engineering/5, Fast-Talk/3, Fighting/5, Lockpicking/4, Move Silently/5, Ranged Weapons/3 (Pistol)

Songs: Form (Ethereal/4, Celestial/5), Possession/5, Shields (Celestial/4)

Attunements: Calabite of Fire

Artifacts: Satan's Hammer (Colt .45, Corporeal Artifact/4)

Discord: Pallid/2

Pelon is actively seeking the word of sabotage. Unfortunately the word is already taken, so Pelon is working his way up in hopes of unseating the current holder. His vessel is that of an unremarkable man about thirty years old who is almost unnaturally pale and smells of decay. In order to hide his Discord, Pelon often dresses as a homeless man. In doing this he has learned of the added benefit of becoming one of society's invisible people; no one notices you and if they do they pay no attention to what you are doing. This is a valuable asset in the line of work that Pelon has chosen for himself.

Pelon has spent years learning how to get in and out of places, and has learned quite a few tricks to make things break in mundane fashion as well. He rarely causes large-scale destruction, but rather uses a tactic usually unexpected of a Calabim: subtlety. He likes to use large explosions in his finales, though. He uses his resonance at times but also enjoys setting up timers and explosives to break small pieces of equipment or short out vital wiring that snowballs into larger problems. Pelon loves to watch the little damage he causes ripple out and cause major destruction for which he is not directly responsible. Taking down the Tether at the World Trade Center is to be his crowning achievement where he shows the rest of the demons what a true Calabim is made of.

* * *

(Editor's note: In the "real world," information about the Boston World Trade Center is available via their website at http://www.wtcb.com Also available is a website about the Central Artery and Tunnel (C/AT), appropriately enough at http://www.bigdig.com .)

Pyramid Pick

Horrors of the Z'Bri (for Tribe 8)

Published by [Dream Pod Nine](#)

Written by Zak Arnston, Joshua Mosqueira Asheim, Hilary Doda, Michael Lee, Andrew Lucas, Jason Prince, Lucien Soulban, Guy-Francis Vella, Marc-Alexandre Vezina, James Wyatt

128 pages

Horrors of the Z'Bri is a sourcebook for *Tribe 8*. This should tell you all you need to know.

If, however, you aren't familiar with *Tribe 8* (shame shame shame!), you might need some more prompting on the book.

The Z'Bri are the third part of the triumvirate of groups around which *Tribe 8* is based. They are the monsters of the *Tribe 8* setting. They don't eat flesh or drink blood (well, not all of them). They're extra-dimension entities of spirit who came to Earth to experience the pleasures of the flesh. Pleasure, of course, is such a variable term.

The Z'Bri came to Earth and formed what were essentially cults around themselves; their dominion over the planet (well, at least the small chunk of it we're aware of) was pretty much complete, with the remaining few remnants of Humanity herded into camps. Humanity was freed by the arrival of the Fatimas, avatars of the Goddess.

They went on to lead the seven tribes, the second leg of the game's setting. The first (and most central to the game) is the Fallen, those tribals who have rejected the rule of the Fatimas (or been rejected by them for one reason or another).

The horror aspect of the Z'Bri comes from one of those quibbling psychological aspects of humanity, in that many of us are uncomfortable (to some degree) with our own bodies. The Z'Bri tend to view the flesh as part artistic medium, part fabric. Since they were originally beings of pure spirit, physical sensation (in one way or another) is an addiction for them.

Think of them, if it helps, as a super-powerful sadomasochist, grabbing hold of everything they can like a kid in a candy shop.

Wow. What a horribly mixed pair of metaphors.

Anyway, in *Horrors of the Z'Bri*, we're given a very deep look at the life of the Z'Bri. The chapters detail life for each of the four houses.

The first house is the Sangis. I find the Sangis the most disquieting of all the houses of the Z'Bri because of their particular brand of sensuality. They are the most openly sexual of any breed of RPG breed I've ever seen (I may, of course, have missed a few). And it's not the "was it good for you?" kind, either. When the Melanis get frisky, you can easily end up with a body count.

They're one of the most powerful houses, with the ruler of the Z'Bri (a Sangis known only as "the Baron") hailing from their ranks. They are, of course, divisive ranks, and it's possible for characters to get wound up in their intrigues

quite easily.

The second house detailed is the Koleris. They are the warriors of the Z'Bri, reveling in bloodlust and pain. Not just the pain of others (they're not picky). In fact, when two Koleris of differing rank meet, the lesser must injure the greater to allow them the experience of pain, while the lesser must be satisfied with a small mark.

The Koleris, as the most militaristic of the Z'Bri, make very fine antagonists in a *Tribe 8* game, providing the glorious physical combat that hack n' slash players (guilty!) love.

The Flemis is the third house of the Z'Bri. The Flemis is a hive mind, with the exception of exiled members of the house cut off from the collective. Not as boring as the Borg, they've got the most interesting of the flavor sections, but I'm stuck on how they would specifically be of use in a game; as a part of the larger Z'Bri whole they work marvelously.

The Melanis are the fourth house. They're the monastic builders of the Z'Bri. They seek knowledge, and one of their best secrets is the art of fleshcrafting. The Z'Bri, you see, don't like artificial things (or dead things). This does lead into one of the interesting conflicts of the game; the Fatimas are all constructed of inorganic materials. The Z'Bri prefer their belongings to be organic. Not just cotton or anything that simple. They prefer living houses. Their armor breathes and their bedclothes warm them with body heat. The bridge to the Z'Bri territory is sculpted from human bone.

This is another of the interesting parallels between two of the factions of *Tribe 8*: The Z'Bri view the Fatimas as horrific because they are of dead things; the Fatimas view the Z'Bri as horrific because, well, they are.

The Melanis are the masters of fleshcrafting, creating the tools and goods of the Z'Bri. This makes them very powerful, as they accumulate mounds of favors for the production of their goods.

The first five chapters are concerned with detailing the lifestyles of the organized houses of the Z'Bri. Just as interesting is the remainder of the book, which talks about other side effects of the Z'Bri in Vimary.

My favorite chapter discusses the Serfs. Serfs are the slave laborers of the Z'Bri, and have always been a bit of a mystery to me. From the description of the various houses of the Z'Bri so far, you're likely getting an impression that their servants are not treated very well. And you'd be right. So why, I've wondered, do the Serfs stay around?

Well, *Horrors of the Z'Bri* explains it, and it's quite a doozy. Let me tell you, it's the world's worst co-dependant relationship. It's one of the freakier aspects of the book, showing just what some people will sacrifice (such as basic dignity & quality of life) in order to obtain something else.

Two offshoots of the Z'Bri are detailed. The Hunters are Z'Bri who take umbrage at the way their brothers are seeking The Seed. They hunt the various members of the houses, taking the soulgems that a Z'Bri leaves on its death. They've the most sympathetic of the Z'Bri, and seem to be on the side of the Tribals and the Fallen. I assume this means that down the road their villainy will be revealed.

The second Z'Bri offshoot is the Gekroh, Z'Bri whose spirits have been chained into animals. They take their name from the first of their kind, who was the mate of the most powerful Z'Bri in the time of the camps. They are some of the most brutal of antagonists, rivaling the Koleris. They don't have the Z'Bri hierarchy on their side, generally being just rogues who've been exiled and Chained as punishment.

Horrors of the Z'Bri rounds out with some mechanical information, as well as tips for implementing the expanded society of the Z'Bri into *Tribe 8* campaigns.

The art in *HotZ* follows the standard of *Tribe 8*, comprised mostly of sketches that emphasize the savage feel of the game. The cover is a creepy rendition of a mouth on leather, presumably meant to represent a Z'Bri tome of some kind (a book, perhaps, that tells a story quite literally).

HotZ is a wonderful sourcebook, full of info that will add body to any *Tribe 8* campaign. It's sole drawback is that it's quite filled with info. It took me nearly a month to get through the book's very dense text, which seemed to be printed in a smaller than average font.

Of course, that the book's only drawback is it's too full of information is praise enough for it. Anyone who plays *Tribe 8* will be delighted by this book; GMs who are looking for interesting and horrifying antagonists to throw against players in almost any fantasy or post-apocalyptic setting will not be disappointed.

-- Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Pick

Stephenson's Rocket

Published by [Rio Grande Games/Pegasus Spiele](#)

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Boardgame for 2-4 players, $39.95

Stephenson's Rocket is a game by Reiner Knizia, who designs so many games, there is a running joke that he is, in fact, 12 or more people. The name comes from a famous locomotive of the 1830's, and the game is an elegant addition to the rail game genre. The board is a nice-looking map of England with a hex grid that extends to Liverpool and Bristol in the west and Leeds and York in the north.

The game has no element of luck, but the actions of other players provide plenty of uncertainty. Money is used, but only to keep score -- you do not have to manage your cash flow in this game. Players are forced to make tough decisions every turn, and the rules interact to require advance planning.

Players perform two actions each turn from a list of three (you can do the same one twice). The most involved is extending a railway line. There are seven railway lines, each with a different colored train token and starting position on the board. To extend the line, you move the train token to one of the three hexes in front of the train token, orienting the back of the train to the hex you came from, and take a share of that company.

Player interaction (besides the normal cajoling and complaining) comes in the form of vetoes. If anyone else has shares in the line you are extending, they can try to veto your move (or force you to give up some shares) by playing a share or shares in front of them and moving the train to another legal hex. The winner of a veto round puts the shares played back on the board. When the train move is final, a track tile is placed on the vacated hex that points toward the train token. You cannot extend the same rail line twice on a turn.

The other two actions are placing a station, which seems to simulate buying real estate in hopes that the railway will come that way, and taking commodity tokens from cities on the board. The stations cannot be placed next to each other or a train token -- the last prevents placing a station and immediately hooking it up to a rail line. Taking the city tokens is the least interesting part of the game -- I'm tempted to use a rule that prevents taking more than one token from a city, or one token of a particular type, to prevent the rounds where everyone just takes tokens off the board.

Extending a rail line can trigger scoring in three ways. When a railway extends to a city, players with that city's tokens get a payoff. When a railway connects to a town, the players with the most stations on that line get a payoff. When a railway connects to another railway, the players with the most shares in the extended line get a payoff and those shares are traded in two for one for the other railway's shares.

The game ends when there are only one company's shares on the board or all of the track tiles have been played. The end of the game can sneak up on you before you do everything you were planning, so don't try to do too much. Another scoring round is conducted with payoffs for majorities in stock and stations per line, and for majorities in the various commodities.

On your turn, you will want to extend rail lines to earn shares, put stations down so they will get connected to a rail line, and take city tokens to get city and commodity payoffs, but you only get two actions. You have to predict what other players want to do and react to their choices, while keeping your own goals in mind. To me this blend of player

interaction, strategy, and tactics adds up to a great game.

The payoff and merging rules are very similar to *Acquire*'s, but the extra game elements and less abstract nature appeal to me more. Fans of the *18XX* series of rail games (or those who find them too much) may enjoy this elegant system that plays in less than two hours but retains the no-luck and rail tile aspects. I like this one more each time I play it.

-- Rich Shipley

Pyramid Review

The Dominion Tank Police Role-Playing Game and Resource Book

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by David L. Pulver

165 pages, $19.95

Dominion is the second anime-based sourcebook for GoO's Tri-Stat System, with the
Sailor Moon RPG preceding it. Much like the *Sailor Moon RPG*, the *Dominion RPG* is written with being a genre
book in mind as well as allowing one to play in the world shown in the anime. However, *Dominion* does a better job
of this than its predecessor, as it is based solely on a four-episode Original Animation Video series instead of a long-
running television show.

The book begins with a brief summary of the "mecha genre" of anime, which includes any show that focuses on any
kind of machine or vehicle, not just giant robots as a casual anime fan might suppose. *Dominion* belongs to the
"mecha police" subgenre, which concerns a special police agency that has high-tech vehicles and weapons in order to
handle criminals the ordinary police cannot. This is followed by a summary of the OAV series, the obligatory "What is
Role-Playing" section, and a listing of other *Dominion*-related works. (Unfortunately, GoO's license only covers the
first anime OAV, not the comics or the succeeding series.)

The next two chapters deal with character creation and the Tri-Stat mechanics. Tri-Stat is very much like a simplified
GURPS, with only three basic stats (Body, Mind, and Soul, ranging from 1 to 12), a few more derived stats, and a
standard advantage/disadvantage, or in this case, an Attribute/Defect setup. A system slightly used in *Sailor Moon* but
full-blown here is "cascading attributes," where one takes levels in a main attribute that give points to be spent on sub-
abilities. In *Dominion* the two cascading attributes are Skills and Owning a Mecha. The mecha creation system is an
abbreviated version of the one used in the *Big Robots, Cool Starships* supplement, done by cutting out the features
only useful for spaceships or giant robot-style mecha. The Skill system appears in *Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies*, but the
version here is quite full-featured.

After this, there is a chapter with information on the *Dominion* world. This is a weak part of the book, as the
information contained is skimpy and not very deep at 16 pages total. While this is understandable given the limitations
of GoO's license from Central Park Media (the American distributors of the anime), it is frustrating. The information is
limited to the events and storyline of the anime, which many players will already know. The general flavor of the city
of Newport and of the world is presented well enough, and a little background in dystopian cyberpunk games and
literature will go a long way towards filling in the gaps. There is still a great deal lacking here -- if Guardians of Order
managed to procure a license to the rest of the series and provide more detailed information, the game world would be
more easily used.

*(Editor's note: The author, David Pulver, was kind enough to let us know that, in addition to the 16 pages of
information on the world's institutions and technology, there are also 21 pages discussing the characters and mecha.)*

The Game Master's section and sample adventures are more useful, as here some liberty is taken from the information
presented earlier. The adventures in particular serve as good examples of how to set up a story in the world of
Dominion, but both sections are still hurt by the lack of solid information.

Overall, the *Dominion* RPG is good but flawed, made all the more maddening as the flaws are not really the author's

fault. As a generic modern-day to near-future book, it is quite good and more detailed than Guardians of Order's generic anime RPG, ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth***. As an RPG for playing in the ***Dominion*** world, it is workable but requires a good deal of effort on the part of the GM. If you are a fan of the anime or are very interested in BESM/Tri-Stat and have not yet bought the BESM core book, this is worth buying. Otherwise, I would advise waiting for ***BESM Second Edition***, which is supposed to include Skill, Mecha, Magic, and Martial Arts all in one volume.

-- Damien Wellman

What's In a Name?

by Owen K.C. Stephens

Art by Phil Reed

GM: You slowly enter the tomb of the Necromancer Lord Nightraven
Stormhammer, peering deeply into the gloom which is just barely
pierced by your flickering torches. What do your mighty heroes do?

Player 1: Bob the Knight readies his trusty blade.

Player 2: Iredic Phen stands beside his old childhood friend.

Player 3: Oulala sneaks past those two, and hides herself in the
darkness.

GM: Okay. The henchmen, Diten and Disix, cower behind Bob and
Iredic. . .

* * *

All fantasy role-playing campaigns, regardless of their game system
or genre, have a few things in common. They all depend on players to
create adventurers and heroes to go on great quests and explore lost
ruins. They all require a Game Master to create those adventures and
ruins and to flesh out everyone and everything else in the game world.
And they all depend on a player's ability to suspend his disbelief, and
become involved in the drama of a fictional world.

No matter how complete a game setting is, there will be minor details only the GM can fill in. Without these elements,
the world will seem flat and two-dimensional. But with believable and internally consistent information a setting can
seem real enough to encourage players to become involved in the game. In most games one of these elements,
appropriate names for the game's cultures, is left entirely up to the GM.

Naming a character can be a difficult task, especially in fantasy games. A player may not have any idea what kind of
names are common to the game world. Very few RPGs include useful lists of names fitting their cultures. This forces
players to either research names from similar periods in our own history, or make up names from scratch. Many
players simply give their character the first name that comes to mind. The results can vary from incongruent to low
comedy.

The more roleplaying groups you look at, the more you'll see the amazing diversity players and GM alike show when
naming characters. Some players go to great lengths to carefully research names which are historically accurate to a

given setting. Others think nothing of saddling their characters with obviously modern nicknames or even worse, purely silly or pun oriented appellations. "Bob the Knight" doesn't have the noble sound of "Sir Robert," and names such as "Pig-Sticker," "Sir Tainly," or "Miss Demeanor" might be appropriate for a slapstick role-playing game, but they don't belong in most serious campaigns.

This problem is compounded for GM, who may have to name dozens or hundreds of NPCs, sometimes with little or no warning. When pressed for time, a GM may decide to avoid naming NPCs at all, or give them hastily thought up names with no connection to the culture or background of the campaign. But carefully considered names can be an important part of a campaign setting and, if well crafted, can help set the tone for a particular fantasy culture.

At the very least, a GM should ask players about their characters' names in advance, and eliminate monikers which are silly, inappropriate, or crude. Although such names may be good for a quick laugh, they eventually destroy any hope of a campaign world feeling real or dramatic. If possible, it is even better for a GM to provide his players with a list of names common to his game world, and an idea of which game cultures the names come from. This not only helps the players name their own characters, but can help the GM name an NPC on short notice.

There are several methods a GM can employ to create believable fantasy names, and prevent the task of naming a character from becoming a time-consuming chore. Most of them require a fair amount of work to set up, but will save time later on when a name needs to be decided on during a game session.

The easiest solution is to simply find a good resource book with a large number of names in it. A local phone book can provide thousands of names, and is generally available at no cost. An out-of-date phone book can be even better, allowing a GM to highlight names which are suitable for his games, and mark off names which have been used. Film credits and magazines can also be good sources containing lots of names.

The primary drawbacks to any of these are that the names may not be appropriate to a fantasy game, and there is no quick index for finding the kind of name you want. A GM may overcome some of these problems by using the source as a basis for making lists of names for his game, but this can be very time consuming, and still may not produce many good fantasy names.

Alternatively, someone who is willing to spend a little money may find buying a baby-name book to be a good investment. Most large bookstores carry a broad selection of such books, and may have different books with names from different cultures. Although there may again be some lack of appropriate fantasy names, these books are typically better than a phone book because they are well indexed, and give a definition for each name. Most also note what language a given name is originally from, which can be useful when making lists of names from different cultures within the GM's world.

The internet can also be a boon to anyone who has access and enough time to search. There are several sites dedicated to providing lists of names from particular countries and cultures. Anyone with access to a decent search engine can likely find a dozen other such sites in a matter of minutes. Many have extensive lists of culturally suitable ethnic names, although most don't include definitions, and some are not well-indexed. Listed below are four sites which are particularly useful for creating name lists.

The Etymology of First Names (http://www.behindthename.com/)

This site has an excellent name list which includes each name's origin and definition, a list of suggested names for twins, and definitions of common name elements for several different languages.

Every Celtic Thing on the Web (http://og-man.net/)

This is a collection of links to several extensive name lists (especially Breton and Irish name lists) and a link to a name finder, which allows you to search for names using many criteria including culture, first letter, gender, religion, and language.

Magickal Names (http://www.silvermoon.net/catala/names/names.htm)

The site has a large selection of non-biblical names and a broad selection of foreign women's names, all with definitions.

The Random Vocabularies or Name Generation Page (http://www.ruf.rice.edu/~pound/)

A site with several random name generators. The results are sometimes odd, but there's lots of good stuff too. Especially useful for a few quick, really unusual names.

Still, for a GM who wants a large selection of names geared to specific settings in his own game world, no ready-made reference will do. Instead, the GM will need to create his own references, tailoring them to his needs. Although this can be time consuming, the eventual payoff is well worth the effort. Having a way to generate names appropriate to each of a fantasy world's kingdoms is a good way to bring a world to life for both the GM and his players. And unlike most background work for a campaign, names are easily transferred to new games if the campaign they were designed for closes.

Creating a list of fantasy names for cultures with an English or American feel can pose a problem. Although there is nothing wrong with such names as Adam, Michael, Susan, or Alice, they often fail to convey the feel of a fantasy game. It can be difficult to think of names which are both ordinary, and convey the sense of adventure most fantasy players enjoy.

But there are many simple, normal names which immediately conjure images of castles and dragons. After all one of the greatest wizards of all fantasy, Merlin, was named after a hawk. Many of these names are found in fantasy literature, and many more are simply names from our own world out of common usage. Many can be found in classic English literature, such as the works of Chaucer and Shakespeare. Others can be derived from worthwhile attributes, titles, occupations, weapons, or local plants and animals common to the culture. The list of common names below is designed for a heroic English fantasy.

Common Names

Male: *Able, Baron, Bard, Blade, Bishop, Dale, Damon, Dirk, Earnest, Fain, Gallant, Hain, Hale, Hawk, Honor, Hunter, Justice, Jolly, Kestrel, Laird, Lance, Levity, Mace, Mason, Muir, Noble, Peace, Peregrine, Pious, Raven, Reliant, Rowan, Steady, Stout, Sturdy, Stalwart, Swift, Tailor, Valiant, Valor, Virtue, Will, Wisdom, Wren*

Female: *Abidance, Angel, Beauty, Brook, Charity, Charm, Chastity, Constance, Cordial, Dear, Fair, Faith, Favor, Gale, Grace, Harmony, Heather, Holly, Honesty, Hope, Jasmine, Joy, Liberty, Lily, Love, Mercy, Merry, Modesty, Opal, Page, Patience, Peace, Pearl, Piety, Pleasence, Precious, Prudence, Purity, Redemption, Robin, Rose, Ruby, Serenity, Spring, Summer, Wisdom*

Additionally, the use of a surname can help invoke the proper feel for a fantasy game, if the right kind of surname is used. Surnames based on medieval occupations can often add to a character's name. Michael might sound like a modern computer programmer, but Michael Harper sounds more like a swordsman from a sophisticated fantasy city. This is especially true of surnames based on a occupation, local place, or common social group. Like the common names above, the following surnames are designed for medieval European fantasy game.

Surnames

Archer, Ashcraft, Angel, Bowman, Cannon, Cooper, Drake, Falkner, Fletcher, Forester, Garland, Greenwood, Harper, Hartwood, Huntington, Kingswell, Kirkland, Lachlan, Maxwell, Northcliff, Oaks, Porter, Potter, Ramsden, Saxon, Seraphim, Shepherd, Sherwood, Templeton, Victor, Wayland, Warford, West, Winter, Yeoman

For more foreign sounding names, it is possible to develop a set of rules to transform any common name into one

consistent with a particular culture. For instance, many Roman names ended with -us or -ex, and several Roman women's names ended with -a or -ae. Although this is an gross oversimplification, similar rules can allow you to create a consistent set of fantasy names from common modern names. The advantages of this system are that there is no limit to how many names you can create, and all the names will have a very similar flavor.

For instance, you could decide that names from a particular city all end with an -o or -re. To help make names sound foreign, you might also decide to replace any 'a' with an 'e' and any 'e' with an 'a.' Using these rules, if you take the name David, it becomes Devido or Devidre. Peter changes to Pataro or Patarre, and even Mike is transformed into Mikao or Mikare. If you want definitions for these names, you can either use the definition for the original modern name, or just make up a new one you like.

This can also be a good way to make futuristic sounding names. As cultures age and evolve, their language and names tend to drift some as well. A few simple rules that define how modern names have changed in a futuristic setting can create a varied but coherent list of names. Changing vowels or simplifying some combinations of letters are good ways to make names sound futuristic. For instance if 'er' has been replaced with 'ax' then Alexander and Peter become Alexandax and Petax.

When using this method, it is best to use no more than three to five rules, and to only modify common names. At least one rule should effect the beginning or ending of the name, and at least one should replace common vowels or consonants. By studying a large number of names from real world cultures, it is possible to develop rules that will produce names of a particular flavor. Many cultures have similar elements for a large number of names, and using these can help generate names that sound similar. Again, a book of baby names or an internet source can help you with this. It's easy to develop new rules for different cultures, or create rules for a culture unique to your game world.

The following is a list of rules that are designed to produce very different sounding names, each appropriate to a different culture. To show what sort of names each set of rules produces, they have been applied them to David, Peter, and Mike.

For short, simple names, remove all the letters before the first vowel (Avid, Eter, Ike). Double the first consonant in each name (Avvid, Etter, Ikke). Then end any name currently ending in a vowel with 'n' or 'l' (Avvid, Etter, Ikken or Ikkel).

For longer names which sound like they come from an old, complex culture, end each name in -ax, -us, or -ex (Davidax, Peterus, Mikex). Replace the first consonant of each name with the next consonant in the alphabet (Favidax, Qeterus, Nikex). Last, add an 'e' after any 'a' (Faevidax, Qeterus, Nikex).

For family names with a Gaelic feel, begin each name with Mac-, Fitz- or Mc- (MacDavid, FitzPeter, McMike). Add an 'n' or 'l' to any name ending in a vowel, and an 'e' or 'en' to any name ending in a consonant (MacDaviden, FitzPetere, McMiken).

For names with a Russian or Slavic sound, add an 'm,' 'i,' or 'o' as the second letter of each name (Dmavid, Pieter, Moike). Change any 'a' or 'u' to an 'i' (Dmivid, Pieter, Moike). End each name in -itch, -re, -va or -van (Dmividitch, Pietere, Moikeva).

One of the best ways to have a large number of names available is to create a name generator. This is a set of tables listing prefixes and suffixes which can be combined to form different names. If the component elements of the generator are all from one culture, all the names created by it will sound like they are from the same society. This works particularly well for cultures in which male and female names are similar, aside from their endings.

The best way to develop such a generator is to start with a modest list of names similar to those you want to produce. This is another place where baby-name books or internet resources can be valuable. Most names can be easily divided into two parts, although sometimes it is difficult to divide a name evenly. It is important that each part of the name not have more than two syllables when divided, or it won't combine well into other names. A little practice and experimentation will usually lead to a good feel for where to divide names.

By listing the first half of all your names on one list and the second half on another, it is possible to quickly mix and match from these lists to create new names. If each prefix and suffix also has its own definition, the name generator will also give each newly created name its own meaning. A good name generator should have a least a dozen name fragments on each table.

Once the generator is complete, a name can be created by rolling randomly, chosen for a particular definition, or picked for how it sounds. A total of two thousand male and female names can be assembled from the generator presented below; more than enough for most campaigns. It is of course possible to create even more names by making small changes to a generated name. If you don't like the sound of a particular name, try adding a 'n,' 'r,' 'a' or 'v.' Similarly, definitions can be changed. If a name meaning "bear slayer" doesn't fit a character, it can be changed to "killer bear," "kills like a bear," or anything else you feel fits. A generator like this should be used only as a guideline.

The following generator is designed to create names for a fantasy Northmen barbarian culture, and is based roughly on Viking and old Germanic names. It could be used equally well for any northern culture, a city of dwarves, or perhaps even a clan of trolls. Although many of the elements for these names were taken from real world names, the definitions are purely fictitious, used only to create definitions for names in a fantasy game. The three tables list a set of fifty prefixes along with twenty male suffixes and twenty female suffixes, and their meanings. Thus by putting together Ig- and -asin the woman's name Igasin is created, which could mean "Fire eyes," "Eyes of Fire," "Burning Gaze," etc.

Northern Name Generator

Table 1 (1d100)
Prefixes

1-2	Af-	Fox
3-4	Arn-	Hearth
5-6	Baer-	Spear
7-8	Bin-	Ice
9-10	Bir-	Death
11-12	Bon-	Ash
13-14	Dau-	Helm
15-16	Dlan-	Sky
17-18	En-	Boar
19-20	Faer-	Sword
21-22	Fan-	Silver
23-24	Fwor-	Elder
25-26	Gei-	War
27-28	Gor-	Axe
29-30	Gren-	Rune
31-32	Hal-	Strong
33-34	Haun-	Rock
35-36	Hol-	Water
27-38	Huer-	Black
39-40	Ig-	Fire
41-42	Im-	Horn
43-44	Is-	Shield
45-46	Jal-	Ancient
47-48	Jor-	Swift
49-50	Kar-	Air
51-52	Kau-	Sun

53-54	Lar-	Bear
55-56	Lys-	Green
57-58	Min-	Oak
59-60	Mur-	Dark
61-62	Nel-	Water
63-64	Nyr-	Goblin
65-66	Oll-	Wise
67-68	On-	Death
69-70	Ori-	Winter
71-72	Parr-	Bull
73-74	Ral-	Black
75-76	Res-	Copper
77-78	Sig-	Dragon
79-80	Sul-	Steel
81-82	Svur-	Good
83-84	Thal-	Gold
85-86	U-	Autumn
87-88	Uy-	Red
89-90	Vala-	Beast
91-92	Ver-	Iron
93-94	Wode-	Storm
95-96	Wun-	Wolf
97-98	Ygg-	Wood
99-100	Ys-	Gods

Table 2 (1d20)
Male Suffixes

1	-an	Smith
2	-ard	Wizard
3	-bauk	Father
4	-del	Hand
5	-etch	Stone
6	-doc	Friend
7	-gin	King
8	-gorn	Son
9	-grum	Biter
10	-gurd	Slayer
11	-nin	Wood
12	-nor	Thrower
13	-onn	Brother
14	-rac	Kin
15	-rem	Stone
16	-sic	Stealer
17	-thor	Warrior
18	-tor	Tower
19	-urd	Master
20	-ylf	Blade

Table 3 (1d20)
Female Suffixes

1	-alla	Dancer
2	-asin	Eyes
3	-ayd	Lady
4	-bunn	Healer
5	-dryd	Spirit
6	-dyss	Sister
7	-eld	Keeper
8	-elk	Daughter
9	-fra	Seer
10	-gerd	Huntress
11	-nyr	Crone
12	-ra	Speaker
13	-rium	Giver
14	-ryd	Wife
15	-syf	Mother
16	-solt	Witch
17	-strid	Book
18	-una	Mistress
19	-wyn	Maiden
20	-yff	Rider

Although no method of creating fantasy names is perfect, all of these can be useful at one time or another. Often it is possible to mix and match these techniques, modifying them to fit your game's needs. If a given culture is going to be the center of a game, it is important to be able to come up with a large number of consistent names for it. But if the players will only be interacting with a few people from one town, it makes more sense to just write up a small list of local names. However you generate these names, they will add flavor and realism to all your games.

Get a Helmet

A Minor Prelude

Not too long ago, a group of friends and I were sitting around a table, listening to Dennis Leary's *No Cure For Cancer*, laughing ourselves sick. One bit caught us by the collar and threw us down to the floor: the Doctor Leary Psychoanalytical Seminar. You don't need to deal with issues of family, you don't need to deal with "stress," you don't need to grasp your inner child. What you need is a good, swift kick in the backside.

"But my father, he abused me when I was. . ."

Whack! Shut the (insert obscenity here) up! Next!

"I don't know what do to about my girlfriend, she. . ."

Whack! Shut the (another obscenity) up! Next!

In short, "Life is hard. Get a helmet."

And let me tell you something, I've worked with a lot of kids in my day, some of whom have *real* issues, not the crap the people I know grouse about. It's like my grandfather told me when I was younger, "If you ever think you've got it bad, open up your (Irish obscenity) eyes and look around. You'll find someone who's got it a whole helluva lot worse."

All of this comes to a very important point. Stay with me. We're getting there.

There's a whole lot of people in this world who spout the "Get a helmet!" philosophy. Then, life kicks them in the teeth with iron-tipped combat boots and they start crying like a fifteen year old who just found out the first girl he ever kissed didn't fall madly in love with him and, in fact, has moved on to someone new. Then, they bitch and moan and complain about how unfair life is, and how if only he'd done things differently, it'd all be different and how could she be so cold, so uncaring, such a heartless, cruel, calculating. . .

Hey. Wait a minute. Where's your helmet?

Like Super Chicken says, "You knew the job was dangerous when you took it."

For those of you who haven't figured it out, here's a bit of existentialist truth for you to chew on.

Life. Isn't. Fair. The sooner you learn that, the better off you'll be.

Now the question you have to ask is this:

If roleplaying games are supposed to simulate life, why are so many people obsessed with making them "fair?"

And with that in mind, let's move on to this month's topic. Twenty bucks says you can't figure it out until we're all done.

* * *

PART ONE: The Problem

Character death is a very difficult matter to handle. Game Masters have to be careful when dealing with a player character's mortality. At least, this is what people tell me. I really don't see what the big deal is.

When it comes down to killing characters, there are really two groups of GMs. The first group are the Dicers. These folks insist that GMs don't kill people, dice kill people. Of course, these are the same people who think guns fire themselves. Secondly, we have the Free Formers. These people insist that dice should *never* have influence over a character's life. Of course, if you actually *play* in one of these games, you'll soon find out that you're playing second fiddle to the GMs NPCs while they tell you a story they could have done all on their own.

No, my friends. The answer lies somewhere in the middle, I think. Somewhere between perception and reality. That's where the GM shines best, stuck right between those two.

It's the reason I have such a problem with *Star Trek*. Whenever I watch it, I know nothing significant will happen to the main characters. Oh, one of them will learn some sort of "life lesson," but nobody ever really changes. The only reason people ever change on TV shows is because they're leaving the show (which means the character gets killed), get pregnant (which means the character gets pregnant), or have to make a movie (which means they go into a coma for a week or two). But in the end, nobody really changes.

Unfortunately, this disease has crept into our industry, polluting it with the same puerile fan-boy fiction we see on *Trek* webpages. Nobody ever changes. Nobody ever dies.

And when we sit down with our favorite character ever Friday night, we have the comforting feeling that we'll be leaving with that character intact. The worst thing he'll have to encounter will be a valuable life-lesson that shows him how he can make himself a better person.

Not in my game, buddy.

You sit down at my table with one understanding: You'd better wear a helmet.

* * *

See, the problem comes down to a simple assumption: you ain't gonna die. If the dice roll badly, the GM will fudge the roll and you'll be okay. Or, you just make sure not to put yourself in a situation where the dice roll badly, and you don't have to worry about getting killed. Besides, only Killer GMs arbitrarily kill characters.

This, unfortunately, leaves you and me in a bind. We can't kill characters without making ourselves look like a villain/schmuck/jerk/Killer GM. If we do whack someone off, we have to blame it on the dice. Otherwise, we get whiny player voice all night long, complaining that he doesn't have a character to play with, and now he has to sit out and wait for the rest of you to finish because *you* killed his character.

Well, friends and neighbors, I got solutions for you. A whole ton of them. So, let's get started.

* * *

PART TWO: The Supporting Cast

The first solution is the easiest. Players always assume they're the main character. Well, just because they believe that don't necessarily make it so. In fact, try running a game where the characters are all Red Shirts. You know the language I'm talking.

This really works for my buddy Ray's *Star Trek* game (he was running the FASA version, that's how old this story is). We didn't play the bridge crew in that game, we played all the guys who went down to the planet *before* the bridge crew showed up. Fortunately, Ray had a very good sense of drama, so we didn't have Kirk and Spock beaming down at the last second to save our bacon every week. No, the officers on the USS Kirkland were a bit too important for that kind of heroics. *We* were the Away Team, sent down to an alien planet to investigate unusual tricorder readings. And by the end of the year, we were the best-trained Away Team you ever saw.

However. . . we went through about seven crew members in the course of that year. We were expendable, and we knew it. Now, a lot of folks may say, "But how do you get attached to a character you know is going to die?" My answer is simple: "How can you get attached to a character you know *isn't* going to die?"

Another good example is *The Thirteenth Warrior*. The narrator of that film (Antonio Banderas) ain't the main character. In fact, he's a very *minor* character. The real hero of that tale is Beowulf (however you want to spell it). He's the one who gets to kill both Grendel and his Bad Mommy (so bad, she don't even got a name). It's *his* story. And though we know Banderas ain't gonna get whacked (he is the narrator, after all), imagine a player in that kind of situation. He *knows* he isn't the hero. He *knows* he isn't the one who gets to kill the Boss Monster. He *knows* he's the sidekick. So, what does he get to do? He supports the Hero. And if he's weak, if his courage breaks, that puts the story one step closer toward tragedy.

Even in a modern game, setting your players up in supporting roles can really give them a sense of mortality. You don't play Romeo, you play Mercutio. And, let's be honest for a second, if offered the choice, who would you want to play? Which brings up a very good point: it's always the side-kick who gets the best lines. He's witty, clever and an all-together great guy. And you can always spot him at the beginning of the film. You know the hero will make it to the credits, but you just don't know if the side-kick will. But you *hope* he does.

Almost as if he was your character.

PART THREE: "They'll be back by sweeps. . ."

This one isn't entirely mine. It's inspired by a story Steve Hough and Rob Vaux told me about a Cthulhu game they were playing in. Apparently, the rest of the party (including Rob) left Steve's character for dead after a vicious attack by Mi-Go. Well, the next week rolled around and Steve showed up. In fact, Steve's *character* showed up.

"Hey Steve!" one of the characters said. "We thought you were dead!"

Steve didn't say a thing. He walked right passed him.

"Hey Steve!" said another. "Where have you been?"

Steve didn't say a thing. He walked right passed her.

Right about then, he reached the gun rack. Before anyone could say anything, he picked up a shotgun and asked the GM if it was loaded. The GM said it was.

And Steve started shooting.

He started shooting and didn't stop until the big, bad combat character (you *always* need one of those in a Cthulhu game) got a hold of Steve and broke his neck.

Of course, if it was *my* game, that wouldn't have slowed Steve down a single bit, but they had a merciful GM and the broken neck put Steve down for good.

The point here is that you really can steal from any source. Like. . . oh, let's say soap operas. Yeah, I said soap operas. I used to date a girl who was addicted to one of those things, I watched it every day so we could talk about it when we got home from work. And there's one rule that's *always* true on *every* soap:

If you don't got a corpse, they'll be back by sweeps week.

PART FOUR: With Friends Like Me. . .

"All right, John," you're saying. "That's all fine and well, but what do I do when I really do kill their character?"

I understand. I really do. When you kill a character, that player has to sit around for the rest of the game. At the very least, he has to make up a *new* character, so he can jump back in.

Why take the scenic route? In fact, why not have him play someone the party already knows.

Like the antagonist.

I was just watching *Batman: The Animated Series* with my wife and the villain was one of my all-time faves: R'as al-Ghul.

"Who?" my heretical wife asked. Ah, the naivete of youth.

The whole kicker with al-Ghul is that Batman's in love with the bad guy's daughter. The kicker with Ghul's daughter is that she's in love with Batman. The kicker with Ghul is that he's in love with his daughter.

And no, not in *that* way. Perv.

It makes a great triangle of love and duty. The power of that theme is seldom captured well, but in the case of Batman and the al-Ghuls, it's perfect.

So. . . why do the players always have to be the protagonists? Why can't one or two of them play *antagonists*? But antagonists the protagonists have some kind of unbreakable link with? That's powerful mojo. Mighty good stories come out of that kind of relationship.

So, what you do is get together with a player before the game starts. You talk to him about your plan. He plays a wacky, lovable character - let's call him "Bob" - for the first eight or ten sessions, then you whack Bob mercilessly. It's a big, bloody Bob mess that won't ever clean up right.

Then, Bob's player drops out for a week or two while the rest of the party looks for the Bad Guy who killed Bob the Loveable Sidekick. Two weeks go by, and your player shows up again, but this time, he's not playing a new character. . . he's playing the Heavy Who Killed Bob (*Bum bum bum BUM!*).

It's a typical technique. Create an intriguing, capable villain in Episode 1, then make him an ally by the middle of the season.

You folks who watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* know what I'm talking about. That show is *littered* with Good Bad Guys and Gals: Faith, Spike, Angel, Jenny the Gypsy Chick, Anya the Vengeance Demon are great examples of bad people the Scooby Gang *has* to work with.

Unenlightened folks who *don't* watch the best show on TV may get what I'm talking about with these examples:

Magneto and the New Mutants.

Han Solo, Lando Calrissian, and Darth Vader.

7 of 9, Quark and Garrik.

(I've got another one, but I don't think anyone will remember her. The first one who can tell me who Princess Aura has a crush on gets a No-Prize.)

All NPC villains (at least anti-heroes) who turn into PCs and join the good fight. If Lucas can do it, so can you.

(Or, if you prefer, the villain doesn't have to be a PC; he can just stay bad. But that requires some serious, heavy duty roleplaying on the part of your player. You have been warned.)

PART FIVE: The Secret

This is the second part of a three-part series about assumptions. The Big Assumptions. Many of you may have guessed that this month's part was about killing characters.

You're wrong.

This month's episode was about something a lot more powerful than death. It's about perspective.

("Perspective: use it or lose it." - *The Tao of Zen Nihilism*)

We all know the players view the world through the Game Master. He's their eyes, ears, tongues, noses and skin. But there's an assumption that goes along with that. Players assume that the GM has to be honest about those perceptions.

Heh. Let 'em.

(How many times have you met a beautiful woman who was convinced she was fat? Anyone who says, "I'm bad at math" is right. So are the people who say, "I can't quit smoking." Absolutely right. Like Richard Bach said, "If you argue for your limitations, you get to keep them.")

People trust their perceptions more than logic, reason and sometimes even reality. (That's called "faith".) Players are the same way. They *have* to trust everything the GM tells them. He's their only source of information.

If the players perceive they're invulnerable, they'll believe they're invulnerable. If they perceive they're just a pack of red shirts, they'll feel that mortality hanging around their necks.

If the players believe all PCs are good and all NPCs are antagonists (at least anti-heroes), they'll lose out on some valuable allies. . . and leave their backs open to ringers (a topic we'll talk about in a few months).

If the players believe that death is the end. . .

What the players perceive is what their characters believe. Have fun with that perspective. Be responsible, but have fun.

After all, it's only a game, right?

* * *

Next month, we'll tackle another assumption. The last one. Not sure which one. Maybe you'll find out when I do.

Take care, and you'll see me in thirty.

But not if I see you first.

Developing Quirks

(Without Looking Like a Boson)

Okay, roleplayers, quiz time. Remember your favorite character. You know, that character you loved, that character you played (or continue to play) for years. That character you knew inside and out.

Okay; this is the character who saved the world from Professor Dystopia's refridgeray. Or the one who forced the Normans away from England's shores. Or the person who took a blaster shot to protect the Emperor.

Question: What kind of music does that character like? What's the best present s/he has ever received? At the very least, how old is the character?

What is that character's favorite hobby? If s/he was handed fifty dollars (or credits or whatever) and specifically forbidden from spending it on ammo, or healing potions, or anything "useful," what would s/he buy?

If you can't answer these questions, or at least know that there *is* an answer, then that character isn't real (at least to my way of thinking).

Now, there's lots of character creation guidelines that tell you to fully flesh out your character, and provide mindnumbing lists of questions to arrive at these kinds of in-depth characters. I generally disagree with these lists; in my mind, creating a character is an organic event. You could no more determine what a character's favorite movie is before that first session any more than you could figure out where you should hang the Dalí poster by looking at a house's blueprints.

But come on. . . this is your *favorite* character. Surely you must know by now what s/he would like to receive as a present. . . what family s/he still has. . . what s/he did (or wants to do) on that 30th birthday.

One of the things that attracted me originally to **GURPS** was the Quirks system; within the game, it encouraged people to come up with the little things that make characters *real*. But ultimately we are all defined by our quirks. I consider myself to be a writer. But so was Patrick "Give me liberty or give me death" Henry, or Edgar Allan "Bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells, bells" Poe. But I hope if you spent five minutes with the three of us, you'd be able to tell us apart. (Hint: I'm the living one.)

I'm also the one who wears a puzzle ring. I wear glasses because I'm very squeamish about my eyes. I fold origami when I'm bored. I sometimes count in binary to fall asleep. I'm a storehouse of useless pop culture trivia, but would be hard-pressed to find New Hampshire on a map of New Hampshire. I use a .sig file for my e-mail, but I always hand-type the "Sincerely," before it. I'm currently trying not to eat pork because I saw a public service announcement with the guy who played police captain General Zefram Cochrane from *Babe*, where he said not to eat pigs, because they're intelligent and don't like to be eaten. And so on.

The character I'm currently playing in our space campaign is also quirky, and, in my opinion, "real." He cooks. He has a code against killing. He tells long rambling stories that occasionally make a point. He has a music system on the ship; whenever anyone hails the ship, he puts on his "theme song" before answering.

Yes, he's a noble (okay; technically a priest masquerading as a noble), but that's not what defines him as a character. James T. Kirk and Jean Luc Picard are both captains, but their *character* comes from other elements. Who drinks tea? Who cheats to win an unwinnable scenario? Which captain would most likely play the flute? Which would seduce an alien diplomat's daughter?

It's all in the quirks. If you're creating a scientist, don't just think of Professor Exposition from a bad 1950's sci-fi flick. . . also remember Dr. Brakish Okun, played by Brent Spiner in *Independence Day* (a more recent bad 1950's sci-fi flick).

- James Bond drinks martinis, shaken, not stirred, and always plays black 17 in roulette.
- The Fonz starts the jukebox by rapping it with his fist.
- Jimmy Olsen always calls Perry White "Chief."

These quirks weren't a part of the original character concepts, but became a part of what makes these characters interesting.

[Warning! Abrupt Transition Zone!]

There's a method for developing your porn star name, where the first name of your porn name is the name of your first pet, and the last name is the first street you lived on. So the names of some of my friends are Silky Thunder, Dutchess Glade, and Rascal Jefferson. This works (for many folks, at any rate) because just about *everyone* has had a first pet, and most of us remember the first street we lived on. What about your favorite character? Has s/he wanted a pet during play? My noble did; now his Rampart Tree Mink (named Ms. Mansor) is a valued member of the party.

As a player, it's been my experience that my most satisfying characters have come from evolution; I may have had strong ideas initially, but through roleplaying and individualizing they became as quirky and real as any person.

So when my Elohite angel from *In Nomine* asks your character, "Who's your favorite Beatle?" (a quirk he developed through roleplaying), will you have an answer?

* * *

All right, folks, I've received a *lot* of reviews in the past week. Thanks. I'd like to see them continue, but you may want to jot me a query first. . . I'm starting to get some duplicates, and that's problematic.

Also, please don't ask about what I'm doing about *D&D 3rd Edition* reviews. I'm not sure yet. I'll let you all know what's going on here as I let the matter percolate. I *think* I have an idea that may be neat, but we'll need to see.

As ever, feel free to [write me](#) with questions, comments, or answers to your algebra homework.

Oh, and I apologize to all the quantum physicists for the pun in this week's title.

-- Steven Marsh (aka Chuck Wanda, Porn Star)

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Werewolf Wild West***, p. 225. (It was partially a trick question, since the same table appears in similar forms in other places, but the "brains of a cactus" was the big clue.)

(two stars) "**Ice Pockets:** The rarest of the para-elemental pockets, the phrase 'an ice pocket's chance in elemental fire' is known in some form or another throughout the planes."

Four Years Of The Comet

"Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part One* I:i:1-3

Ninety years ago today, the Earth was not destroyed when it passed through the tail of Halley's Comet on May 19, 1910. It's the uncooperatively stolid nature of our planet under even such dramatic conditions that encourages GMs to change it to suit their roleplaying needs, to make it more malleable, not with "laws of physics" but rather something akin to "guidelines of physics." Herewith, then, four campaign frames of such turbulent transition presented for your approval. (If you approve sufficiently, I've got at least two more waiting for room in a future column, and neither are the **GURPS Undead-All Flesh Must Be Eaten** game you're thinking of right now.) And what better harbinger of change than the Great Comet itself? In legend and superstition, the appearance of a new element in the unchanging skies marked the entry of the uncanny or the disastrous ("ill-starred") -- surely it can do the same in your game.

"I remember the terrifying predictions made by the honest and credulous astronomers, who must have been themselves hypnotized, or they could not have hypnotized the rest of us, in 1909. Wills were made. Human life might be swept from this planet. In quasi-existence, which is essentially Hibernian, that would be no reason why wills should not be made. The less excitable of us did expect at least some pretty good fireworks.
I have to admit that it is said that, in New York, a light was seen in the sky."
-- Charles Fort, *The Book of the Damned*

Mark Twain famously and correctly predicted his own death with the return of Halley's Comet; the French astronomer Camille Flammarion predicted the death of everybody else, from the cyanogen latterly detected in the Comet's tail. Panics ringed the globe, and entrepeneurial snake-oil drummers sold "Comet pills" for protection. In this world, they didn't work either. Out of a global population of 1600 million, over 99 percent died in the week after the Comet passed, and 90 percent of the survivors died in the plagues that spilled off the mountains of the unburied dead. (Large land animals died as well, as the planet suffered a Great Extinction equivalent to the destruction of the dinosaurs. Only animals immediately needed by man were shepherded through the decimation, and not all of those made it.) In the immediate aftermath of the Dying, warring gangs from empty New York, London, and Shanghai fought over the plentiful but irreplaceable stocks of rifles, tinned foods, and other goods. These struggles destroyed civilization almost everywhere save for British military posts in defensible, garrisoned ports such as Cape Town and Gibraltar, where discipline and tradition barely survived the chaos. By 1976, global population has returned to 20 millions (the population during the Bronze Age), and the Gibraltarene trading nation (ruling a rough coalition of city-states from Lisbon to Naples) is ready to send out expeditions over land to the Ruhr for desperately needed coal, and by sea in rebuilt tall ships to attempt the rediscovery of America. Of course, the Purified Caliphate of Cairo has agents everywhere, so only small bands of adventurers can be trusted. . .

This world begins as a **GURPS Y2K** setting and can be run as anything from post-holocaust rebuilding a la **GURPS Horseclans** to barbarian adventures in a desolate land of weird astronomer-cults a la **GURPS Conan.** Bogus "mutations" can give you sea serpents, dire wolves and other "very low fantasy" monsters for a "ruin crawl" game through the catacombs of Paris looking for treasure; a brilliant madman hiding out on an experimental submersible or a mountain fastness can be heroic patron or villainous would-be despot for **GURPS Steampunk** or something akin to ***The Morrow Project: 1910.*** Various Illuminated groups (probably in the healthy air of Tibet or the sealed caverns beneath El Dorado) might emerge to contest this world, as well. This frame also might work (with a 99.99% death toll) for the Halley's passes of 1986 or 2061, for a higher tech to fall from and find in the ruins.

"The work showed among other things that comets were not dirty snow balls sublimating (vaporizing) in the solar environment, but were a complex plasma discharge interaction involving an asteroidal comet nucleus with the "solar capacitor," the capacitor being the result of a differential flow in the solar wind of high energy particles leaving the sun. The balance of charge in the solar system and a myriad of of other previously unknown effects were predicted by

the theory, including the existence of an electron sheet arriving from the sun at a cometary nucleus and resulting x-rays. Only recently have these been verified by observation."
-- James McCanney, "Plasma Discharge Comet Model"

Rather than killing people, perhaps the comet kills technological alternatives. The plasma tail of Comet Halley set up a standing wave in Earth's atmosphere, damping electrical discharges and draining batteries. (Bioelectricity remains unaffected, or we're back to the first option.) Chaos strikes the most advanced nations; "electric cities" like Buffalo, New York become temporary anarchies. Eventually, the authorities restore order and steam returns to its rightful place -- higher-stroke and higher-pressure engines, new ceramics, and improved machining create new generations of steam-cars, Babbage-Hollerith engines (eventually using fluidic transistors), and so forth. Heliographs spring up where telegraph lines had been laid, but regionalism becomes a problem again as empires fray. London never loses its gaslight -- but as resources begin to pinch, wars become more common and more brutal.

This frame serves as the *deus ex machina* for a TL5+2 **GURPS Steampunk** game; GMs can easily assume that the stultification of technical progress in many areas similarly retards political change, giving a proper "punk" desperation to a world more and more polluted with coal-smoke and oppressed with poverty. For a more upbeat world, assume that the Comet also sets up an etheric standing wave that Tesla or Kelvin can tap for energy, communication, and transportation; or move it to the 1835 Halley appearance, so that folks don't really know what they're missing; or both.

"Forty-five years ago, a comet flashed through the sky above a small Midwestern town. It was like an omen to the parents of a child born that night -- a child they named Adam Blake. As Adam grew to adulthood, he found himself possessed of strange abilities -- telepathy, great strength, clairvoyance. He was a mutant . . . "
-- Gorilla Grodd on the secret origin of Captain Comet, *Secret Society of Super-Villains* #2

The Comet's weird emanations transmogrified the germ plasm of humans all across the globe. The American Strong-Man, Cal Essex, was the most famous thanks to the cinema-films of his exploits (although he was usually portrayed by Douglas Fairbanks). The brilliant scientist Doktor Optikon of Berlin managed to harness his electro-vision powers to create brilliant devices that altered daily life for all -- and ensured German victory in the Four Weeks' War of 1914. The Empowered Fists massacred foreigners throughout China in brutal displays of focused chi -- only the quick actions of Le Zephyr and Tetsuo Iron-King saved the Shanghai compound long enough for it to be evacuated. Quick thinking and rapid co-optation of native supermen by imperial powers kept European rule in Africa and elsewhere in Asia intact, and economic growth papered over social turmoil as superwomen demanded suffrage and equality throughout the West. Nonetheless, the system was openly groaning at the seams when the first of the Children of the Comet hit puberty in the mid-1920s and began to manifest powers and abilities beyond even the first set of supermen. (Kirk Alyn, the Ultimate Man, and the Albanian nun "Agnes Dei" being the most powerful.) The advanced nations have begun experimenting with N-Rays and other emanations to boost their own first super-generations' power and hopefully spark new supermen artificially. With turmoil in the colonies, the threats of war from vengeful France and imperial Japan, and villains like Der Nebel (a.k.a. Walter Schellenberg) on the loose, something has to give.

This **GURPS Supers** (or **Champions** or **Aberrant** or etc.) campaign frame assumes equal distribution of supers; someone who wants to more closely model traditional comics should assume a radiation flare that occurs while the Comet is over the American Midwest. Either way, it's the Silver Age second generation that's just coming on scene as of about 1935 in this frame. You can slide it into any other Comet pass you like from 64 A.D. (for the Roman supers frame from our earlier column) to something like super-swashbucklers in the 1607 or 1682 passes. And it would be just too much fun not to try a game of Revolutionary heroism after the 1758 Halley sighting.

"I have stated again and again . . . that there is absolutely no proof that this is an inhabited alien craft. I have also entertained the notion that it may be, in order to explore what that might mean before it ends up on our doorstep -- as unlikely an outcome as I consider that would be. Like me, the rest of the public is generally perfectly well aware that the object may be entirely natural. And even if it isn't, then why should we need to be protected from that?"
-- Whitley Strieber, "The Hale-Bopp Companion: The Proof Has Been Here All Along" (1996)

Under cover of the Comet's corona, a strange craft descends to Earth, landing in the most technically-advanced city on the planet: Berlin, Germany. Quickly claiming protection from the Kaiser as Ambassadors of the Pleiades, the ship's

blue, humanoid crew begin introducing technical advances as fast as the German laboratories can assimilate them. The Pleiadeans remain diffident about their purpose and become indispensible not only to the German industrial cartels like Krupp and I.G. Farben, but to the Kaiser's military as well. Wilhelm's arrogance soon becomes overweening, and only the fear of Germany's antigravity craft under Luftmarschall Baron von Richthofen and robotic landwaffen under General Hindenburg prevent France, Britain, and America from attacking him -- especially after German-alien arms rapidly conquer a Russia fallen into civil war in 1918. Germany assigns itself African colonies, territory in the Antarctic, oil rights in the Pacific, and a dominant financial role in Latin America while the Allies fume powerlessly, pirating dribbles of technology in a desperate attempt to catch up. However, in 1936, Clyde Tombaugh's discovery (using gamma-scopes reverse-engineered by Nikola Tesla) of an incoming alien armada forces the Pleiadeans to reveal their secret -- they are actually a very isolated team of political operatives ordered to mobilize the Earth to block the Zeta Reticulan invasion in this sector. The Earth has, unwittingly, been drawn into an interstellar war -- possibly on the losing side!

This can be a campaign of spies and smuggling if the GM wants to keep the Cold War brewing until the Zetans land in 1941 (or set the game in the tense 1920s), a heartwarming tale of humanity throwing off its petty rivalries in the face of planetary extinction if the Allies join Germany in the Pleiadean coalition, a four-cornered storm of no-holds-barred anachrotech warfare as the Zetans rapidly arm their own human proxies, or even a Resistance game opposing both alien occupiers with human wits and desperation. For a real change, players could be alien agents within humanity: either Pleiadeans (use Zhodani from *GURPS Traveller* or Pachekki from *GURPS Space*) or Zetans (use Drakkarans from *GURPS Traveller* or Greys from *GURPS Black Ops*) or some other race on Earth incognito to be Our Sophonts In Station Sol.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

$[?]$

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

$[?]$

Murphy's Rules

$[?]$

?

by Joe G. Kushner

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Phil Reed

Most Novas have it pretty easy. Fame, fortune, and the adoration of the masses. What happens, though, when strangers from a "Brave New World" start showing up at your door with tales of a "Ravaged Planet?" Some novas may be interested in what these deltas have to say. Others might wish to test their mettle against these so called alphas, while some will just ignore the problem. After all, aren't there enough problems on one planet? In any case, the following article provides GM's with the tools necessary to convert characters from the *Brave New World* system to the *Aberrant* system.

This article relies on the reader to have access to the *Brave New World* book and the *Aberrant* book. In addition, readers should be familiar with both systems. The following article deals the conversions, but it does not point out page numbers.

Stats

Brave New World uses four main stats while Aberrant has nine. While *Brave New World* uses a number of dice and *Aberrant* a number of dots, the two are very similar. Which stats go where? The following chart shows the comparison:

Brave New World	*Aberrant*
Smarts	Intelligence
Speed	Dexterity
Spirit	Manipulation
Strength	Strength
Size*	Stamina

Every 1d in *Brave New World* adds one dot to the *Aberrant* statistic, not counting the one dot in each attribute *Aberrant* characters start with. Thus a character with a *Brave New World* Strength of 2d6 will have an Aberrant Strength of 3. This does mean that the minimum stat of the new Aberrant character will be at least two for these attributes. Ignore scores of six dots or higher. Because some statistics do not have exact matches, the Game Master should give the *Brave New World* character an additional six points that may only be spent on Attributes that have no current scores. (Where did this number come from? *Aberrant* characters get a total of twenty three points: seven, plus five, plus three, plus one in every attribute. *Brave New World* characters get twelve points for stats, plus five for Size.)

* For the most part, Size is not a variable statistic in *Brave New World*, and its *Aberrant* counterpart Stamina will almost always equal to five dots. Like Novas, Deltas are assumed to be made of sterner stuff that regs, so they gain the full benefits of a five Stamina including the ability to Soak lethal attacks.

Skills

Skills in **Brave New World** are equal to Abilities in **Aberrant**. In **Brave New World**, each skill has a number which adds to the die roll. For example, someone with a Fighting Barehanded of two and a Strength of four would roll 4d6+2. In **Aberrant**, a person with a Brawl of two and a Strength of four would roll 6d10. Each number in **Brave New World** equals one dot in the **Aberrant** Skill.

Some skills in **Brave New World** are specialties in **Aberrant**. If a specialty shows up more than once, such as Acrobatics and Dodge, take the higher of the two values and list the two specialties by the skill. The GM may decide that characters converted from **Brave New World** do not have to follow the maximum of three specialties if the character has already paid for these skills in **Brave New World**. Once converted, though, all standard **Aberrant** rules apply.

Lastly, if the character has a skill in **Brave New World** that is a specialty in **Aberrant** with no main skill, the main skill is considered one dot less than the specialty. For example if a delta has Tactics at 3 but doesn't have any skill that translates into Command, the delta would have Command at 2 dots. The minimum ability is one, which would still give the delta two dots when using that specialty.

The following chart shows how to convert Skills into Abilities. If a subskill from **Brave New World** is not listed, that it because it is a specialty in **Aberrant** and not a special skill, such as with Language, where it would be time-consuming to write out every possible language the character may know.

Brave New World	*Aberrant*
Academia	Academics
Acrobatics	Athletic Specialty Acrobatics
Archery	NA
Arts	Arts
Artillery	Firearms
Area Knowledge	Academics specialty Geography
Boating	Pilot
Bravery	NA
Bureaucratics	Bureaucracy
Climbing	Might specialty Climb
Computing	Computer
Criminology	Bureaucracy specialty Criminology*
Demolition	Engineering specialty Demolition*
Disguise	Style Specialty Disguise
Dodging	Athletics specialty Dodge
Driving	Drive
Escaping	Investigation specialty Escaping*
Etiquette	Etiquette
Faith	NA
Fighting	
Barehanded	Brawl
Flying	Brawl specialty: Fighting in Flight
Forgery	Intrusion specialty Forgery*
Gambling	Biz specialty Gambling*

Language	Linguistics
Leadership	Command
Lockpicking	Intrusion specialty Lockpicking
Martial Arts	
Barehanded	Martial Arts
Blade	Melee specialty knife, or sword.
Medicine	Medicine
Mimic	Perform specialty Impersonation
Navigation	Survival specialty Navigation
Perception	Awareness
Performing	Perform
Persuasion	
Bluff	Intimidation specialty Implied Threat
Charm	Etiquette specialty Social Graces
Interrogation	Interrogation
Intimidation	Intimidation
Seduction	Subterfuge specialty Seduction
Taunt	Manipulation specialty Con
Piloting	Pilot
Profession	
Accounting	Academics specialty Accounting*
Administration	Bureaucracy specialty Administration
Architecture	Arts specialty Design
Business, Clergy	Academics specialty Religion
Finance, Law	Biz
Engineering	Engineering
Quickdraw	NA
Riding	Athletics specialty Riding*
Running	Endurance specialty Long Distance Exertion
Science	Science
Scrounging	Streetwise specialty Scrounge
Scrutinize	Rapport
Search	Investigation specialty Search
Security	Intrusion specialty Security Procedures
Shadowing	Stealth specialty Trail
Shooting	Firearms
Slight of Hand	Legerdemain
Speed-load	NA
Sport	Athletics specialty Sports.
Stealth	Stealth
Streetwise	Streetwise
Survival	Survival
Swimming	Athletics specialty Swimming
Tactics	Command specialty Tactics

Throwing	Athletics specialty Throwing*
Tinkering	Engineering
Tracking	Stealth specialty Trail
Trade	
Carpenter	Engineering specialty Construction
Electrician	Engineering specialty Electronics
Machine Operator	Engineering specialty Mechanics
Mechanic	Engineering specialty Mechanics
Plumber	NA
Weaponsmithing	Engineering specialty Armaments

Skills that are listed with a * are specialties that are not normally found in *Aberrant* but will not disturb the game system. Skills listed with NA are skills that either do not apply to *Aberrant* or have no special skills in *Aberrant*. For example, it's hard to list a conversion skill for *Faith* when in the main book for *Brave New World* Faith has no game effects on deltas powers.

Quirks

These are similar to Merits and Flaws, which are absent in the *Aberrant* system. In some cases, the quirks give the character a quality from an attribute. During the conversion process only, the character can gain more than one quality per attribute. This is one of the few areas where deltas may surpass novas. The following notes cover what Quirks do in the *Aberrant* system.

- **Delta of Reg:** No effect in the *Aberrant* world as no devices has been crafted yet to detect deltas.
- **Public Identity or Secret Identity:** In the *Aberrant* World, Deltas would be treated far differently then they would at home. Those who went public would be heroes, while those who stayed hidden would have privacy. Now, if only those pesky people from Project Utopia would leave him alone. . .
- **Registered or unregistered:** No effect in the *Aberrant* world.
- **Alert:** This gives the character the quality Observant for the Perception attribute.
- **Ambidextrous:** The Game Master should allow this to be a quality for the Dexterity attribute.
- **Arrogant:** This is a medium-level aberration under Mental Disorder.
- **Authority:** Rated +1 to +5, each plus in *Brave New World* equals one dot of Influence.
- **Beautiful:** The player has his choice of the Appearance quality Alluring or Sensual.
- **Bloodthirsty:** This is a medium-level aberration under Mental Disorder.
- **Brave:** This gives the character the quality Determined under the Stamina attribute.
- **Brawny:** The gives the character the quality Stout under the Strength attribute.
- **Contact:** Rated +1 to +5, each plus in *Brave New World* equals on dot of the Contacts background..
- **Dark Secret** can be something that the Game Master works into the background of the character, as well as a Background option in *Aberrant*. It depends on the Dark Secret. Using the Dark Secret example from *Brave New World*, this might involve the character hiding his own trail through a dot or two or Cipher, as well as having a Contact that would only work for the character as long as the character had dirt on him.
- **Destined for Greatness:** This amounts to an extra Five Willpower Points, or works exactly as described in *Brave New World*. Players should beware, however, as most Novas are not considered lesser characters!
- **Double Jointed:** This gives the character the quality Flexible from the Dexterity attribute.
- **Favor Owed:** This works as a Contact until used.
- **Gear:** Rated +1 to +5, each plus in *Brave New World* equals one dot of the Resources background.
- **Iron Jaw:** This gives the character the quality Resilient from the Stamina attribute.
- **Light Sleeper:** This gives the character the specialty Keeping Watch from the Awareness ability.
- **Lucky:** This gives the delta one extra Willpower point every game session. When used, it works just like it does in *Brave New World*.
- **Patron:** Rated +2 to +5, each plus in *Brave New World* equals one dot of the Mentor background.

- **Photographic Memory:** This gives the character the Mega-Intelligence Enhancement Eidetic Memory.
- **Rich:** Rated +1 to +5, each plus in *Brave New World* equals one dot of the Resources background.
- **Self-Confident:** This gives the character an additional two dice to resist persuasion attempts.
- **Self-Righteous:** The character suffers a loss of two dice when attempting to persuade someone who doesn't agree with his convictions. If dealing with someone who does agree with his convictions, the character gains two dice with persuasion attempts.
- **Sense of Direction:** Works the same in *Aberrant*.
- **Sense of Time:** works the same in *Aberrant*.
- **Sharp Ears:** Gives the character the specialty Acute Hearing from the Awareness ability.
- **Sharp Eyes:** Gives the character the specialty Sharp Eyes from the Awareness ability.
- **Sidekick:** It is assumed that the Sidekick made it to the world of *Aberrant* with the character. Otherwise, the ability stays the same. It's important to note that, while similar to the Followers background option, it is not the same since novas cannot be followers.
- **Skeptical:** This gives the character an additional two dice to resist attempts to persuade him unless there is proof to back up the persuasion attempt.
- **Snobby:** The character loses one die when attempting to use any type of Persuasion skill.
- **Tough:** Gives the character the Unflagging quality from the Stamina attribute.
- **Unlucky:** Every time the character rolls a 1 on the dice, consider it two ones. This makes it much easier for the character to botch using his powers.
- **Voice:** soft voice gives the character the Pleasant quality from the Appearance trait while hard voice gives the character the Imposing quality from the Appearance trait.
- **Wise:** The character has his choice of the quality Rational from the Intelligence attribute, or Level-Headed from the Wits attribute.

It a Quirk has not been covered, that's because it is most likely a roleplaying tool such as addiction, arrogant, or bad habit. These quirks can be noted and roleplayed, or the Game Master can say that the journey refined those elements so that they are no longer such a strong part of the character's make up. Game Masters can also look over these roleplaying quirks to help the player determine what type of Nature the character has.

Powers

Consider deltas to have at least one Quantum if necessary to determine quantum multipliers. Otherwise, ignore quantum. This means that in some cases, a delta will actually have it easier than a nova for long term situations.

Bargainer

- Bargainers lose all of their powers upon arrival in the *Aberrant* world.

Blaster

- Blaster Armor is equal to two dots of *Aberrant* Armor.
- Blaster Energy Blast is equal to three dots of Quantum Bolt. The player must determine if he wishes the blast to inflict bashing or lethal damage.
- Tricks
    - Blast Punch: By making at least three difficulty rolls of 8, the blaster can channel his energy to his fist and inflict his strength plus fifteen dice of bashing damage, or twelve dice of lethal damage. This can be combined with superblast, but the character must hit the target number five times. If he only hits it three times, the blast punch still works, but the superblast fails.
    - Superblast: By spending an action to build up his power, the blaster gains another dot of quantum bolt, up to four actions. In addition, the character must hit his target number by at least two extra dice or the attack fails. Some desperate deltas, when confronted by nova attackers, take the standard penalty for multiple actions in one round and attempt to use the superblast in the same round that they summon it.

Bouncer

- Fast: Considered to have two dots of Mega-Dexterity.
- Strong: Considered to have one dot of Mega-Strength.
- Tricks
  - Bounce Attack: If bouncer makes an extra success on a melee roll, the hero can bounce off one foe and attack another, all on the same action. The bouncer must score at least three successes on the new attack. The hero can continue bouncing from target to target if he gets another success on the new attack roll. Unfortunately, the penalty is cumulative so the next time, the bouncer must five successes, then seven, then nine. There is no limit to the number of times the bounce attack can be performed.
  - Flip-Toss: If the bouncer gets two successes on a melee dodge, he can grab the attack while still in midair and toss his foe. The throw does the bouncer's damage in strength as well as any extra damage for dangerous objects such as glass or other pointed objects.

Flyer

- Armor: Flyers have two dots of Armor but only while their using their flying ability.
- Flight: Considered to have two dots of Flight.
- Tricks
  - Bursts of Speed: With each extra success against a target number of six, the hero can add one dot to his flight power for this round. This roll requires an action.
  - Flying Dodge: Resolved normally through opposed rolls.

Gadgeteer

- This character has Mega-Intelligence at two dots and the enhancement Mental Prodigy with either Engineering or Scientific. Due to their ability to maintain their creations, they do not have to spend a quantum point to activate these abilities. It's important to note that their inventions tend to baffle novas who in theory are smarter, but can't spend the proper amount of time in their prodigy state due to lack of quantum points.

Goliath

- Armor: These characters have four dots of Armor.
- Big: They have two points of Mega-Stamina.
- Powerful: They have two points of Mega-Strength.
- Tricks
  - Rock your world: Equal to the Mega-Strength Enhancement Shockwave.
  - Superjump: Equal to the Mega-Strength Enhancement Quantum Leap.

Gunners

- Most gunners should be considered Exceptionally Normal. While greatly skilled with guns, they have no real delta or quantum powers. GMs should allow these character to max out their firearms skill, as well as taking the Mega-Dexterity Enhancement Accuracy and the Mega-Intelligence Enhancement Analyze Weakness.

Healer

- Healing: Similar to the Mega-Stamina Enhancement Regeneration, the Healer is able to use this power on others. For every success against a difficulty of seven using the healer's Medical skill and a Healing Power level of four, the Healer brings up one level of bashing and lethal damage. The power takes twelve actions to use, but healers can reduce the amount of time by taking away dice as standard multiple action resolution.
- Tricks

- Use the same number of successes to heal disease and poison as found in the ***Brave New World*** sourcebook. If one of the rolls fails, the whole process fails and the healer cannot try again.

Scrapper   New World Order

- Armor: Equal to two dots of Armor.
- Healing Factor: The character has one dot of Mega-Stamina.
- Strong: The character has one dot of Mega-Strength.
- Tricks
    - Fast Healer: The character heals lethal damage at the same time as bashing damage.
    - Dirty Fighting: The character gets to add two dots to his brawling skill in addition to gaining the Dirty Maneuvers specialty for the Brawl ability.

Speedster

- Fast Runner: Equal to three dots of Hypermovement with the specification of Running Enhancement.
- Lightning Reflexes: Equal to two dots of Mega-Dexterity.
- Tricks
    - Afterimages: Equal to one dot of Holos.
    - Burst of Speed: With each extra success versus a roll of six against dexterity, the character can add 2 to his modifier for Hypermovement. This roll requires an action.

Miscellaneous Notes

Delta Points are equal to Willpower and a temporary pool of Delta Points times two. Most deltas will start off with three willpower and six points. If a player wishes to increase his permanent Willpower, he must spend part of his six points for attributes on a one for one basis. This has no effect on the temporary pool.

What about deltas that want to improve their abilities? These deltas who stay long enough in the Aberrant world are saturated with quantum energy that slowly but surely changes them from deltas to novas. At that point, they lost their old ***Brave New World*** tricks, and can trade them in for power extras. In addition, the new novas must use quantum points to pay for their powers, and are susceptible to taint, just like a regular nova.

Lastly, the Game Master should not allow players to create character using the ***Brave New World*** system just to convert them over. Only those players who already have characters should be allowed to convert their characters to the *Aberrant* system.

An Actual Conversion

Matt tells that group that he wants to stop playing ***Brave New World*** for a while and try out the new ***Aberrant*** game that he got for his birthday. His current group of players seems up for it outside of Bill, who's enjoyed his blaster tremendously. Seeing the conversion article, Matt decides to give it a shot.

Brave New World

Cannon Fire

Smarts: 4d6

Area knowledge: Crescent City 2, Computing 2, disguise 1, language: English 2, security 3
Speed: 4d6
　　Acrobatics 2, Dodging 3, driving: personal vehicle 2, martial arts: barehanded 3, martial arts: blade 2, shooting 5, stealth 3
Spirit: 3d6
　　Bravery 2, perception 2, persuasion: charm 2, scrutinize 2, search 4, shadowing 2
Strength: 3d6
　　Climbing 2, running 1, swimming 2, throwing 1
Size: 5
Pace: 9
Delta Points: 3
Quirks: Beautiful, delta, dependent: younger sister, iron jaw, rich, secret identity, self-confident, sharp eyes, unregistered, wanted.
Powers:
　Armor: 5/-
　Energy Blast

Aberrant

Cannon Fire

Nature: Based on his confident quirk, and the fact that he's an unregistered delta, the GM decides with Bill that Cannon Fire is a Thrillseeker.
Allegiance: None
Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5, Perception 2, Intelligence 5, Wits 2, Charisma 3, Manipulation 4, Appearance 3

Abilities: Academics 1 (specialty geography), Athletics 3 (specialty acrobatics, dodge, swimming, throw), Awareness 2 (Sharp Eyes), Computer 2, Driving 2, Endurance 1 (specialty long distance exertion), Etiquette 1 (specialty Social Graces), Firearms 5, Intrusion 3 (specialty security procedures), Investigation 3 (specialty search), Martial Arts 3, Melee 1 (specialty sword), Might 1 (specialty climb), Rapport 2 Stealth 3 (specialty trail) ,Style 1 (specialty disguise)
Background: Resources 3
Qualities: Alluring, Resilient
Bonuses: Plus two dice to resist persuasion attempts.
Powers: Armor Two Dots, Quantum Bolt three dots.

Since the blaster already comes with the Beautiful quirk, Bill decides to make his character a handsome charmer with two in Appearance and Charisma. That doesn't leave him with too many points left, so he puts one in Perception, and Wits. While the Game Master could veto Cannon Fire's rich quirk, he allows it to pass through. He figures that Project Utopia has paid Cannon Fire quite a lot of money just to study him.

The other elements have to be decided on a case by case basis. For example, is Cannon Fire's younger sister on this world, or stuck on the Ravaged Planet? Will he keep his identity a secret on this new world or attempt to cash in even more on his riches?

Bill looks the character over and knows that despite his two dots of armor, he might have to purchase some more armor with his resources. He doesn't feel too bad though, because unlike novas, his delta can shoot quantum bolts without limit and he can still walk away from most small arms fire unhurt.

?

by Steve Jackson

You hear it all the time. Big deal, you think. "I support them. . . . I shop there," you think. But that's not all there is to the idea of "support."

Let's face it: the full-line game store is an endangered species. Adventure games are a niche market. To the extent that any product breaks out of the niche, it is immediately sold elsewhere. You can find *AD&D* in bookstores. You can find *Pokemon* in bookstores, Toys 'R' Us, and corner gas stations! (Often, in fact, the corner gas station can get *Pokemon* when the local game store can't.)

So as soon as our genre produces some mass-market cream, it gets skimmed off into other channels. The full-line game store has to make do with the items that appeal only to the serious game fan. And it's hard to run a quality operation with a limited line and a limited clientele!

You'd think, though, that the serious game fans would realize this and work to build up their retailers. But that doesn't always happen. The average lifespan of a game retail store is not impressive. Too many retailers are undercapitalized, poorly located, and -- because they haven't been in business long -- inexperienced. Some survive to gain experience. Some don't.

(At this point, you may be asking: "If Steve believes this, why does he run a big online store with lots of game lines?" The answer is simple: there are a lot of towns with no game retailer at all, or no good one. My site, Warehouse 23, sells at full price, and should not be any competition to a real live game store that treats its customers well. If the world were full of game stores like that, there would be no market for online retailing, and all the publishers would be happier and richer. Full-line game stores are good for publishers too.)

The fact remains: the local game retailer needs all the help he can get.

Why Should You Care?

In the first place, though the Net is wonderful, it's still easier to find a variety of games on the store shelves. There they are, right out in the real world. You can pick them up, shake them, read the components list on the box. And if you don't see exactly what you want, a good retailer will let you special order.

It's a natural meeting place. If your local store vanished, where would you find other gamers? Not every store has a gaming area, but every store is still a natural gamer hangout. There's probably an opponent-finder bulletin board, and if not, the guy behind the counter knows who's looking for players. What would you do if you lost that?

Think of the store as a community. Think of it not as a retailer making money by dipping into your pocket, but as the host of your local gaming network. Think of it as a group of people with common interests, goals and needs. It really is a community. Now, what can you *do* for your community?

Ten Ways To Help

- Buy stuff. Well, duh! But that's the best place to start. Take it off the shelf, take it to the counter, spend money. And don't just buy for yourself. If you need a gift for somebody who has any interest at all in games, you've got a chance to give a little more business to your Friendly Local Game Store. So do it.
- If you don't see what you want, ask for it. Ask if they'll special order it. (If the store won't do special orders, they are shooting themselves in the foot. . . they're not supporting *you*. . . and you have my permission not to cry when they go out of business.) But if they *do* offer a special-order service, use it!
- If you have to buy stuff elsewhere, tell your local retailer, and tell them *why*. Don't expect any local store to meet some fly-by-night online site's 30% discount (and don't expect that site to be there next time you try to find them). But if the new *Rifts* book has been out for a month and your retailer still doesn't have it, and you get it someplace else, you should say, nicely, "I wanted this book, and you guys didn't have it, so I bought it elsewhere." Not only will that deliver a wakeup call. . . . it will keep somebody from assuming that there's no demand for *Rifts* any more. No, the reason they're sitting on the shelf is that all the regulars gave up and went somewhere else first.
- Send your friends there. Don't assume that everyone you game with already knows about the store where you shop. It's amazing how word gets around. . . and how sometimes it doesn't.
- Get to know the owner. You never know where that can lead. But the more the owner knows his customers, and knows about them, the better a job he can do. And if his customers are also his friends, he'll like his job better, and he's more likely to stay in business for you.
- Offer feedback. Now that you know the boss (and the employees), tell them what you like and dislike. About the store, about new products, about President Clinton. Okay, forget President Clinton. But the rest of that feedback is very valuable.
- Help keep an eye on things. You don't have to become a cop. But you can help build an attitude among the regulars (which will be sensed by the not-so-regulars) that this particular store is *not* a place for shoplifting, vandalism, littering and trash talk. This is *your* place and everyone had better respect that.
- Volunteer for store events. Offer to run demonstrations or to help with a tournament. (Your store doesn't do those? Suggest it.) Now, a gig like this is often unpaid, or paid only in store credit. But it's support, it's a chance to spend an afternoon gaming in a different way, and it *ought* to be fun. And who knows? It might lead to a job someday.
- Volunteer your special skills. A small retailer needs a lot of different talents and abilities. . . and few retailers *have* top scores in all those talents. So they do the best they can. They'd do better if you helped. Making signs? Writing advertising copy? Web page design? Painting miniatures or models for display? Now, I'm not advising you to start a whole new, unpaid job. If the retailer gets a *lot* of work out of you, you should get something back. But if there's a way for you to make a big difference with an hour's work, why not offer?

Again: Your store is not just bricks and mortar. It's a community. . . . at least, it should be. When you help your local store to be a better place, you're supporting your local gaming community.

* * *

Editor's note: To find a retailer near you, visit the [Gamer and Store Finder](#).

by Jonathan Souza

This adventure is for a team of black ops, optimally a team of two Combat ops, one Tech op, one Security op, one Intel op, and one Science op. Variations on this theme are allowable, as the Company will give the team the required members. The team should be fairly well experienced (about 4-5 missions under their belt), and the team has to be pretty skilled in dealing with problems via their heads more than their guns.

Starting Out

The team gets their first warning when the Company contacts them and sends them a message via Omicron to report in for a briefing. The briefing is in the form of unlabeled videotape and an envelope of papers on the subject. The videotape is direct, and to the point:

> Hello and good evening, ladies and gentlemen. A few days ago, Centurion Computing Systems released a new palmtop computer called the Centex. This computer is equal or better to the Cistron that we issue to Technology ops. In addition, we've been hearing reports from inside that they're going to release new technologies that are equal or better to our own. There's a suspicion of possible interference by extra-terrestrial influences and such. You're to discover if this is due to Grey or other ET influences, or possible compromise by someone in the Company. Your equipment list is in the envelope as well as information on the company itself.

The tape self-destructs soon afterwards, and the players should review the equipment list, which gives them:

- Enough automatic pistols (all in .40 caliber Glocks) to equip the entire team, and silencers for the guns.
- Ammo for the guns.
- A full set of surveillance and computer-cracking gear.
- Heavy monocrys armor for the combat ops, light monocrys armor for everyone else.
- Information and paperwork to help the ops to get into the company with identities, as hired workers.

In addition, the team can request any sort of equipment listed in the book (except for experimental gear) within 12 hours and requests for personnel within 24. The information on Centurion Computing Systems (CCS) is like many other startup computer companies in San Francisco -- a nutty bunch of inventors and developers that gave up jobs with bigger companies and went to work independently. The company has twenty-two employees, and none of them have had contact with anyone that has worked for an Argus front company, according to the investigation. The team has tickets to San Francisco Airport and their gear will arrive at the safehouse at the same time they do.

Getting To Work

The team of ops arrives at the safehouse and start getting set on the job. The safehouse has vehicles for the team: one minivan for surveillance (treat as a TL 7 van, except for TL 8 sensors and a instant chameleon), and enough mid-sized cars to carry the team (all look like TL 7 equivalent cars, but built with TL 8 gear and armored).

Silicon Dreams

The team should, by the first day, have figured out how they will get started.

The first thing the team should do is investigating the company itself. CCS recently moved into a new office complex in San Jose, and getting hired with the expanding company would be easy for the ops. The team quickly realizes that it's the top four people -- the head of the company, Walter Morrow; his two best friends Nick Allyson and Wang-Li Gi; and the girl that gave them the garage to work in, Lisa Patterson -- that are the inventive and creative parts of the company. There appears to be no form of contact or method of transmitting information to the four -- taps on their e-mail system both at home and at work seems to be a mixture of work e-mail, bad jokes and stories, and some erotic commentary about the relationships in the office.

If the team decides to break in and search the homes of the four top people, all they'll find is somewhat messy apartments and maybe a little bit of pot and cocaine. GMs should be willing to play this up for all it's worth, as a team of very well-trained covert ops try their best not to get caught by rent-a-cops, and what happens if they do. Working out a check on the top people for Grey implants would be difficult, but not impossible -- the team will learn that they were checked and found clean. Expanding to search the twenty-plus people of the company will take too much time for the ops, but they will quickly discover one piece of information -- of all the employees, only ten, including the top four people -- have been with the company since they started their innovative streak.

During this investigation, the team will hear that CCS is about to release a new computer system -- the Navi system -- which would be easily equal to a TL 9 mini-computer. The ops will hear from the Company that unless the Navi can be proven not to be developed by hostile forces, it has to be stopped or the creation and the creators destroyed. The estimated release date of the Navi is one month, and the team is ordered to resolve the problem in under a month or "clean up" the situation.

Hunting down these ten people will quickly winnow down one name -- Morgana Lafayette. She's a twenty-six year old secretary and her personal history has a few major "blanks" in it, as well as having some other problems -- including that she was rumored to be the lover of the top people in the company. Searching her apartment will quickly reveal several things that will make the ops suspicious. A doctor's prescription for Pitremenopine (which Science ops will tell players is commonly used by people with psionic talents to keep their powers from working while they sleep) and documentation on certain items of hardware of early TL 9 computer designs are only just a few of the things found.

Interrogation of Morgana will reveal that she had been getting visions of such things -- but she hadn't revealed the plans to the company. A good team of investigators will reveal that where she had some of her blank spots have had links to Grey operating zones. Calling in a PsiOp to check on her story will reveal that she's telling the truth -- but she does have some latent telepathic ability. And, she does have a Grey implant in her, which looks like it had been placed there in one her "blank" periods a few years ago.

Hunting Down The Grey Road

The players will have to use Morgana's telepathic link to the Greys to find the Grey nest. They broadcast the plans to her, and her own telepathic ability "relays" the signal to one of the four inventors, who think that it's their own idea (and they innovate on it). By helping human computer technology grow more rapidly, the Greys have access to hardware to rebuild their ships and equipment. They didn't develop the Navi system, but they will make use of it to get access to more and better hardware.

Tracking down the Greys will be difficult. The moment they realize that Morgana has been compromised, they will cut the link to her and start packing up to leave the area. But what they didn't know is that they left enough information in Morgana's head to let the ops be lead to the area where they established their base. Assuming that there is a Psi-Op available, the Op will be able to narrow down the signal to within about ten degrees and a thirty-mile arc in the southeast of Morgana's apartment. Contacting the Company for information on Grey psi-transmitters, they'll indicate that the estimated range of transmitters is about forty miles -- and is about the size of a small car. Investigating warehouses and other type of locations (as the area is too well-inhabited for the Greys to establish a concealed base without someone noticing it) will reveal that a large warehouse was rented in the last six months. This warehouse is next to the San Jose Airport, and is of sufficient size to hold both a Grey saucer and the transmitter hardware.

The warehouse has armed guards carrying M16s (see Grey Guards stats), claming that the warehouse is under FBI investigation, and no story or documentation that the team uses will allow the team into the warehouse. Any attempts to force or bribe their way in will cause the guards to go from firm statements to deadly force, very rapidly. Using FBI contacts or checking to make sure that there is a real FBI investigation will quickly reveal that the FBI doesn't have any idea of what's going on at the warehouse. The team does detect, if they're doing surveillance of the warehouse, a lot of activities -- clean-up activities that seem to be coming close to a resolution -- sometime that night, probably about 3-4 am.

Cleaning Up The Problem

The team really has two options at this point -- let the Greys escape or attack the warehouse at some point that night. The first option isn't one the Company would really like, but if the team does it, they'll see the "FBI" guards open up a door in the warehouse and the saucer will take off; the guards will quickly disperse to six cars and drive them away in separate directions. No amount of tailing will reveal where the guards get in contact with the Greys, or their equipment -- and no amount of interrogation will reveal this, either. However, the Greys do have an implant in all the guards. If they let the Greys escape, the team will be told that their handing of the situation wasn't perfect and will be told to do better next time.

The second option is the one the Company would prefer. Besides the players, the Company can provide three Combat ops and a Security op to help keep the scene clear of people not involved in the little attack. All team members will have a Castor '94 Assault Carbine and a Heavy Monocrys suit, as well as communications gear for the assault. Any other reasonable gear (grenades, night vision gear, etc), will be provided. Exotic or experimental gear will require the players to have a very good reason for it (and require good rolls on their Fast Talk skills).

The layout of the warehouse is fairly straightforward, but there are several locations worth noting and being aware of.

- **Front Office.** This room is accessible from the street. It has a few simple chairs, a receptionist's desk, and an old coffee machine. There is not much else here, except for two Grey Guards waiting. One is behind the desk, the other is sitting down enjoying his coffee (they'll both have to take an action to bring their weapons to the ready). The receptionist's computer has no real information on it other than a few appointments for the "cover" staff.
- **Office Space.** The front office leads to this area. These are several small offices (consider the walls PD 2, DR 20). There are four Grey Guards in the office, sipping coffee and chatting about "government foul-ups." Unless previously alerted either by Grey telepathy, gunfire, or the other Guards, it will take two actions for the Guards to be ready for combat (one to get their weapons, one to ready them). The computers in the offices are fairly

standard, and have no real information on them.

- **Bathrooms.** Leading off from the office space are men's and women's bathrooms. Each has two stalls. Other than that, ordinary.
- **"Security Area."** This room adjacent to the office space has two ready Grey Guards that can respond to an attack instantly. The walls of this area, the warehouse area around the saucer, and the large doors exiting the warehouse, is PD 3, DR 100. The door has a retinal/telepathic lock and the door itself is DR 250. It leads to a large area where the Grey Saucer is being held.
- **Curtain.** Dividing the area between the Security Area and the floor where the Saucer is, this curtain is very flimsy and easy to damage; bullets will just go through it, and a knife will easily cut it. It seems to part the moment the players put an object through it, and has no real effect on play other than to act as an obscurant for the Saucer (-4 to hit).
- **Grey Saucer and Equipment.** A team of four Greys is working here. Two are loading the equipment on the saucer (several large items, using contra-grav pallets to help manipulate them). One is breaking down equipment with a tool, and the last one is at the seat of the saucer, powering up the reactor to allow the saucer to take off. The moment the attack happens (the first Grey Guard that detects an Ops will set off the alarm), the three Greys outside the ship will move to get the already disassembled equipment into the saucer. The fourth one will work harder to bring the saucer up to full operational power. If the Ops manage to get into the hanger, the three Greys will open fire with omniblaster pistols (either in narrow-beam or standard mode), and the fourth Grey will get into the top xaser turret and start shooting at the Ops. Killing a Grey or two will result in the last Greys escaping into the saucer, sealing it up and blowing the outer door (throwing the doors over a hundred meters away), and flying away at top speed, firing back into the hanger to do as much damage as possible.

If the Ops move *very* quickly, they can secure the Saucer. The Grey in the top turret won't switch over to the bottom turret because its field of fire is blocked by the equipment; within touching distance of the Saucer and a few feet away, the xaser can't fire and hit targets because the body of the saucer blocks the weapon. Assuming Ops capture the saucer, the Company will move a team in **very** quickly to take it away. If not, the Greys escape, leaving behind many confused people and several bits of equipment.

The Resolution Of Affairs

Dynatronics personnel, reviewing the Navi's plans, inform Argus that they can be modified so that the Grey plan to use them to steal information won't work. With a few doses of the Cocktail to people like Morgana and the Grey Guards, a plan to break into the computer market by the Greys has been thwarted. And the Ops get vacation time -- four days of time to themselves. A good reward for excellent work.

Characters Involved In The Adventure

Morgana Lafayette

ST 11, DX 12, IQ 15, HT 10
Advantages: Animal Empathy, Attractive Appearance, Fashion Sense, Intuition, Rapid Healing, Telepathy 15(Uncontrolled, only useable by Greys as a relay), Unusual Background (Latent Telepath), and Comfortable Wealth.
Disadvantages: Delusions (Quirk, "Men love what I enjoy giving them"), Dreamer, Involuntary Duty (Grey Telepathic Relay), Lecherousness, Slave Mentality (only vs. Grey Telepathy, -20%), Weirdness Magnet.
Skills: All Professional/Office type skills, Akido-14, Erotic Arts-14, Savoir-Faire-15, Sex Appeal-15, Guns (Pistol)-10

Morgana wears mostly hand-dyed outfits, usually of either Arabian or Indian origin. Her personality is very sensual and she's able to project an aura of feelings and sensuality upon those around her. While she wouldn't initiate violence, she will defend herself. She does own a .38 revolver at home, but no other weapon (and her shooting is poor).

Grey Guards

ST 14, DX 14, IQ 12, HT 14
Advantages: Collected and Composed, Combat Reflexes, High Pain Threshold, two levels Strong Will.
Disadvantages: Delusion (Major, Believe that the Greys are "people"), Duty (To defend the Greys), Slave Mentality (only vs. Grey Telepathy).
Skills: Guns (Light Automatic, TL 7)-15, Guns (Light Automatic, TL 8), Karate-15.

There are eight Grey Guards involved in this adventure. All of them had been, in the past, captured by the Greys and subjected to long-term mind control as well as being implanted. They all believe that the team of four Greys in the warehouse is a group of government officials, and that they're working for a covert operations branch of the government. Any efforts to convince the Guards that the Greys are not human will be rejected (short of long term psychotherapy or a combination of Telerecieve and Mindwipe to fix the damage). When they're operating as "government officials", they are wearing TL 9 Combat Infantry Dress torso units (PD 4, DR 50 for hit locations 9-11 and 17-18) concealed as TL 7 heavy body armor, armed with M16 assault rifles. When operating as "covert officers", the team wears full Combat Infantry Dress, and helmet with radio communicators in them. They are also carrying TL 9 Storm Carbines (UT2) loaded with AP ammo, six magazines of ammo and four concussion grenades (6d damage, detonate on impact, but the grenade doesn't generate fragments). To the Grey Guards, they're defending the best of the United States (if a tad humorless) from Communist hordes/Militia fanatics/insane Islamic terrorists (take your pick).

Accidents of Birth

by Marcus L. Rowland

Art by Paul Daly

Forgotten Futures VI is an RPG based on Victorian melodramatic theatre. In many adventures the Villain (a capital "V" should always be used) will be a player character, and is encouraged to show his or her villainy by asides to the audience, dramatic soliloquies, maniacal laughter, and general skulduggery; the other players run the Hero, the Romantic Lead, and possibly henchmen and other supporting characters, and may also use these staging devices. The players are aware of the situation; their characters only know what happens "on-stage", until the Villain is unmasked as the plot reaches fruition or goes so badly wrong that villainy becomes apparent.

Players are also encouraged to "double" in roles, taking two or more parts who are never "on-stage" together simultaneously, and to adopt "attributes" which motivate their characters or add complications to their lives, such as Romantic Illegitimacy (the character is the illegitimate child of nobility or royalty), Doomed (often in the form of a mysterious wasting illness that manifests as pale good looks and an amazingly mild and non-irritating cough), Insanity, or Uncanny Powers.

Somehow two obvious attributes were overlooked; both relate to the circumstances of the character's birth, can apply to almost any character, and work very well in a game with doubled roles. They can easily be applied to other games systems such as *GURPS*, especially in melodramatic and romantic settings such as *GURPS Swashbucklers* and *Scarlet Pimpernel*, or settings where the accidents described below are likely to occur; *GURPS Old West*, for example.

Separated At Birth

The character has a twin brother or sister, but they were somehow torn apart immediately after birth, or as very young children, and have lost contact. This might involve kidnapping, murder, a divorce, or a simple accident. Traditionally one is wealthy and the other poor, one goes to a happy home while the other is abused, and so forth. It is entirely appropriate to the genre for one to be the Hero and the other the Villain; usually they should not be played by the same person, since a confrontation is almost inevitable, but they may very well be able to assume the other person's identity as a disguise. Often one will know about the situation, the other will not.

It will usually be assumed that the missing child is dead. If so, there may be problems proving the character's true identity, especially if false claimants have muddied the waters.

Optionally the siblings may experience a psychic bond, so that one somehow knows when the other is unhappy or is in pain. This should not be used to send messages between the characters -- it's a vague feeling, not telepathy -- and is in no way directional.

Characters need not necessarily know that they have been separated at birth; one or both may be unaware of the situation. For example, there is a long (and often tragic) tradition of characters who fall in love then learn that they are brother and sister. The *Star Wars* trilogy presents an obvious example.

As a variant, adventurers may pretend, or may be forced to pretend, that they are the long-lost siblings or children of wealthy characters or NPCs, especially if the parents are dead. A good example occurs in the film *Candleshoe*. It is

dramatically appropriate for such characters to turn out to be the real long-lost heir.

Heroes will naturally make all possible efforts to find their missing twin; if rich they will hire detectives, or conduct their own investigation. If poor they will still try to find out the truth, by consulting whatever sources are available to them. However, they will fail until it is dramatically appropriate for them to succeed.

Villains will also try to find the missing twin, and will probably succeed. A rich Villain will fear that the missing sibling will claim a share of his wealth, and plot to eliminate the unwelcome complication (see, for example, *The Man In The Iron Mask*); a poor Villain will plot to take the fortune that should rightfully be his, take his sibling's place, or both. However, a poor Villain will not present himself as a genuine long-lost heir; that's too simple, and any self-respecting Villain will naturally want the entire fortune, not just a share.

The Romantic Lead has always wished for a twin, and may know that one once existed; if so, she will never be able to find her sibling until it is dramatically appropriate. She will feel an aching void in her life, which should be good for at least one song or soliloquy, and is most likely to feel the psychic bond described above. Rich Romantic Leads will want to share their good fortune with their lost sisters; poor Romantic Leads will hope that their missing sister is equally happy.

Example

Brothers Alistair and Robert Fosbury-Smythe were separated six months after birth; their parent's yacht, the Prospero, sank in a violent Channel storm. Robert was saved by his father but Alistair was never found and is assumed to have drowned with his mother. In fact, Alistair's cot floated free of the wreck and was found drifting the next day by Gerard D'Ascoigne, a French wine smuggler. D'Ascoigne was on his way back to France, and had no intention of revealing his presence in British waters, so he left the child on the steps of a French orphanage, where he was taken in by nuns and later adopted.

Accidents of Birth

Nearly thirty years later Father Jean-Paul St. Cyr, formerly Alistair Fosbury-Smythe, is summoned to the death-bed of D'Ascoigne; the latter has no idea that St. Cyr is the child he rescued, but wants to confess his misdeeds, including the story of the wreck. A few weeks after the storm he heard about the Prospero and realized that the child he found must be the one that was lost, but never did anything about it. Now he can't remember the name of the yacht or the child, just that it was in all the British newspapers -- the child had very wealthy parents. He tells St. Cyr enough to make it certain that he is the child.

St. Cyr has always wondered about his origins, but has been unable to find out anything in France; now it seems that he is really English. Although he has renounced worldly goods, the Church could probably make good use of any inheritance that may be owed him. . . A trip to Britain would be expensive, but might answer many questions.

Meanwhile Robert has grown up bad, a rake and scoundrel who has squandered most of his parents' fortune and is now a daring criminal. He and his henchmen currently plan to hijack a liner, sink it in the sea offshore from his mansion, then dive down to steal bullion that will be in its strong room. He knows that his brother survived; he met one of D'Ascoigne's crew a few years ago, and heard the story of the baby they found at sea, but was never able to trace it past the orphanage.

St. Cyr's arrival and attempt to locate his family should cause problems for Robert, by attracting unwelcome attention to his activities. His attempts to claim his rightful estate are even more damaging, since any prying into the family fortune will show that Robert has sources of income that can't readily be explained. St. Cyr must somehow be

eliminated without arousing suspicion. Robert plans to kidnap him, take his place, and arrange a tragic "accident" with the help of his henchmen. But St. Cyr isn't entirely without defences; he played Rugby football and boxed for the orphanage and his seminary, and God is on the side of the Righteous. . .

Swapped At Birth

The character and another child were somehow swapped soon after birth; for example, a nurse might mix up two babies in a hospital, or a nanny might wheel away the wrong pram and then cover up her mistake. In less modern settings a child might be swapped by gypsies; in a campaign with fantasy or horror elements supernatural creatures might substitute one of their offspring for a human child. See, for example, *Good Omens* by Terry Pratchett and Neil Gaiman.

Both children somehow know that they are out of place, although nobody else usually notices that (for example) the child has brown eyes when both parents have blue, the child has great musical talent which the parents totally lack, the child is a bad-tempered bully when the parents are unusually kind, etc.

This attribute can be combined with Separated At Birth, producing two pairs of mismatched twins, but this may best suit a campaign with comedy elements. Another possibility is the exchange of three or more children; again, this may best suit a comic campaign.

It is entirely appropriate to the genre for the characters to know each other without realising that they have swapped places, for one to be rich and the other poor, for one to be the other's servant, and so forth.

Heroes probably notice that they are unlike their parents, but won't brood about it and are unlikely to realise the truth, unless it becomes dramatically appropriate; they'll simply assume that their rugged good looks, strong right arm, steely jaws, and any unusual talents are a freak of genetics. They are most likely the swan in a family of ugly ducklings, and are usually poor but honest.

Villains usually get the best of these situations; they are generally rich (having taken the Hero's rightful place), are often in a position to give the other child a hard time, and are much more likely to know that they have somehow risen above their station. The down side is that they know that they have to defend their position.

The Romantic Lead is usually the beautiful daughter of a family of swineherds, or otherwise forced into the mire, while her replacement will generally be a cruel employer or member of the nobility, and jealous of her beauty. The Hero will be torn between the attractions of the Romantic Lead and her replacement, who is generally a Villainess.

Example

Note: This example adds an extra and extremely optional plot complication to one of the *Forgotten Futures VI* adventures, *The Wages of Sin*. If you are likely to play in this adventure please **do not** read on! A one-year discrepancy in the age of the principal characters, as given in the original adventure, should be ignored.

Twenty-three years ago two young mothers were admitted to the maternity ward of a Cornish cottage hospital. One was Norma Pellew, the wife of a wealthy scientist; the other was Caroline Fox, an unmarried housemaid from the Pellew mansion. She refused to say who fathered her child, and died within hours of his birth. Somehow, in the confusion following the death, the two children were swapped, and baby "Fox" was adopted by an aunt and bought up in a neighbouring town, while baby "Pellew" was bought up by "his" family.

Today Captain Roderic Pellew DSO is a young officer in the Indian Army; unknown to his "parents" he is deeply in debt. He is currently on leave and staying at their mansion, while planning various crimes (including murder) to ensure that he will inherit their estate; his preparations include a simple disguise as the butler, Sylvester Potter, whom he finds curiously easy to impersonate. . . this is not surprising since Potter is his father! Roderic suspects this, but still believes that Norma is his mother, and assumes that she must have had an illicit relationship with the butler. Naturally he has no intention of doing anything to reveal this. Roderic is also pretending to be romantically interested in Lady Maureen

Kincaid-Speller (of the Loamshire Kincaid-Spellers), the Romantic Lead, who is staying at the house, but this is mostly a cover for his nefarious activities.

Meanwhile Thomas Fox has become a young Detective-Constable, and is currently working undercover at the Pellew mansion, posing as Professor Pellew's secretary and waiting for a team of country house burglars to strike. His aunt has told him very little about his birth, and he has no idea that his "mother" worked at the house, or that his origins are somewhat more exalted than he believes. He is deeply attracted to Lady Maureen, but naturally would never dream of expressing his feelings to a lady so far above his station in life. Lady Maureen is initially attracted to Roderic, but soon senses the evil that lies beneath his pose as a gentleman, while finding herself strangely attracted to Fox.

As Roderic's crimes are uncovered he and Fox fight, and Fox's shirt is torn to reveal a birthmark that often occurs in the Pellew family; a mark that Roderic lacks. Some detective work will then reveal the truth, and allow Fox to come into his true estate and marry Lady Maureen.

Use With GURPS

New Disadvantage: Separated at Birth: -5/-10 points

The character was separated from a sibling soon after birth (and this fact *will* become relevant to the game, sooner rather than later). For -5 points the character knows the sibling's name and approximate location, but they are not in contact; if contact is resumed, the missing sibling should usually become a -5 point Dependent OR a -5 point Enemy, although other variations are possible (such as gaining a Sense of Duty or a negative Reputation as "the bad one of the family"), or the character may simply buy off the Disadvantage with experience. For -10 points, the character is at best unsure of the sibling's name, location, or status; if contact is resumed, the missing sibling should become a -10 point Dependent OR a -10 point Enemy. Resumption of contact will often have other, temporary, adverse effects on the character, such as financial or legal problems.

In addition, if the character has taken the -10 point version of the Disadvantage and is properly role-played as having no idea of the location or nature of their brother or sister, the sibling can be taken as an Unknown Enemy (see p. CI77); in that case, the sibling is aware of, and actively working against, the character. If contact is resumed, there will often be catastrophic financial or legal problems for the character; use these, along with increased frequency of Appearance for the no-longer-secret Enemy, and anything else that feels appropriate, to keep the character's points total balanced.

If this disadvantage is taken the GM can, if desired, roll secretly (or just decide to increase the confusion); on an 18 it is actually an advantage! The missing sibling will become an Ally with the appropriate points value if contact is resumed, and all financial and legal problems will resolve in the character's favour. However, until both characters accumulate enough experience points to pay for their new, improved situation, they will be subject to all manner of temporary Disadvantages of appropriate value; possibilities include Disowned ("I told you never to have dealings with your brother!"), Duty, Enemies acquired from each other's pasts, Mistaken Identity, Sense of Duty, reduced Wealth, or, in best melodramatic tradition, Weirdness Magnet.

Characters who know all about lost siblings (such as the Unknown Enemies mentioned above) do not automatically gain points for their existence, but often have a related Delusion (such as "One should *never* trust family"), Obsession ("I must eliminate my twin before this whole mess causes me trouble") or Secret ("I'm not really the rightful heir").

The Evil Twin disadvantage (GURPS Compendium 1 pg. 77) might be combined with Separated At Birth, or appear among one or both character's Disadvantages after the situation becomes known.

New Disadvantage: Swapped at Birth: Value Varies

The character and another child were somehow swapped soon after birth. This may mean that the character has suffered economic or other forms of harm which will be rectified if the truth is revealed, or that the character will suffer such harm if the truth is revealed. In *GURPS* terms, this takes the form of various Disadvantages (and possibly

also Advantages), which may be radically changed around if and when the truth is revealed. For example, the character might start play with low Social Status and Wealth, which rise rapidly when he is revealed to be the rightful heir to a fortune - but be replaced by an Enemy, defined as the former claimant to the wealth and his cronies. (Discovering the truth often leads to a character acquiring new Enemies, frequently the person for whom they were swapped.) Alternatively, a character who is aware that she is not really entitled to her privileged position might have a Secret, which becomes lower Status and a bad Reputation if the truth is revealed; or someone who knows the truth and has a special interest in the case may represent a Secret Patron or Unknown Enemy.

In extreme circumstances, being Swapped at Birth might give a character features such as Primitive or a bizarre Unusual Background; the legendary Greystoke Case is an example of this.

The Karmic Ties advantage/disadvantage (GURPS Compendium 1 pg. 39) can usefully be combined with either of these disadvantages.

One interesting way to use both of these disadvantages is for the GM to decide that they are in fact Delusions of appropriate points value; the adventurer believes that he or she has been swapped or separated, but is mistaken. This doesn't rule out the possibility that the twin or other child is hostile to the adventurer; if the story is convincing enough both may believe it!

Note: In campaigns in which sentient beings hatch from eggs (such as **GURPS Planet Krishna**) these disadvantages might be moderately common, and hence worth fewer points; in **GURPS Goblins** they are the norm, and should only be taken as a disadvantage if there is something very odd about the circumstances.

Many thanks to John Dallman for several suggestions, and to Phil Masters for extensive help with the **GURPS** *portion of the article.*

Pyramid Review

D&D: Diablo II Adventure Game

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by By Bill Slavicsek and Jeff Grubb

Boxed Set (112 pages), $19.99

If you are anything like me, then you have been wondering for quite some time
when the heck Blizzard Entertainment is finally going to release the long-awaited
Diablo II computer game for Windows. They got us all hot and bothered a short
while ago with promises of its release sometime around Christmas '99, but that never happened. And now here we are
in May, still waiting eagerly to play it.

Fortunately, our friends over at Wizards of the Coast has come through for us where Blizzard has fallen short. So,
those of you ultra-hungry for that first taste of *Diablo II*, the chance is here with WOTC's first batch of roleplaying/PC
game cross-overs with the folks at Blizzard. The ***D&D: Diablo II Adventure Game*** is one of the first of these releases,
and it takes the ***D&D 2nd Edition*** rules and applies them to the world of *Diablo*.

Players now have the chance to play all of the cool characters found in *Diablo II*, while exploring the game's infamous
underground caverns and slicing through its many beasts and monsters. The advantages of releasing this game in
pencil-and-paper format are obvious. A human DM and the lack of a restricting computer interface make for infinite
possibilities that simply could never be explored in the domain of a computer. So how does this cross-over version
stack up?

Pretty good. The first thing that must be noted is that this supplement is clearly aimed at beginners -- those with little
or no familiarity with *D&D* (Especially those who are fans of *Diablo*). The rules are all very simplified for quick play
and easy understanding. Indeed, a group could be ready to play a mere hour after opening the box. The characters are
all pre-generated, and all of the necessary rules are printed clearly on the character sheets and DM's screen
respectively. There is, of course, a handy rules book that will explain to the DM everything that he or she needs to
know to get things going, as well as a bunch of other cool stuff.

The presentation and layout are all very well done, with nice slick playing materials, and well explained rules. The
game comes with a "game board" (more on this in a moment), player and monster pieces, and even dice (although
mine were suspiciously absent from by box). So there is no need to purchase any other game boards or source
materials in order to play.

As noted before, the game mechanics are all reduced to a very simple level. Anything not directly relevant is left out,
and only the basic system is explained. Skills are all accomplished using stat checks, and all special abilities are
executed through the use of mana (one will also note that a few things have been renamed into *Diablo* terms). The
downside, of course, is that these limited rules place a cap on how many miles one will get out of the game. Players
can only advance to fifth level, and after a while even novice players will start trying to pull things that the rules don't
even attempt to cover. In this aspect, it's truly more of an intro supplement for those that don't know anything about
D&D. Sooner or later, they'll need to move on to the real thing. Nonetheless, the game's easy play and the nostalgia
factor will also make this one a fun one-shot for experienced *D&D* players who had a lot of fun playing *Diablo* on the
PC.

The game also comes with a quest book that contains six consecutively linked adventures that follow a light plot,

which loosely follows that of the *Diablo* computer game. They are all very basic dungeon crawls that use an interesting game board system. One of *Diablo*'s big features is that it uses a random dungeon generator, so that every time you play it's a unique experience. The **D&D** version mimics this through its own random generation system. Instead of having a single game board, you have a bunch of board pieces like long corridors, large rooms, alters, etc. Whenever the players enter a new room, a D6 is rolled to determine what type of room comes next. Each dungeon features three special rooms and a quest room (reached once the three special rooms have been cleared). There are six quest rooms included in the box, which correspond to the six adventures in the quest book.

So what about all the stuff out of *Diablo II*? Just as the **D&D** rules have been boiled down to simplicity, so have the *Diablo II* elements. The five new characters are present with a sneak peek of each of their abilities (we see five out of however many they'll have in the computer game), the magical items are there, and, of course, the game's monsters are there. What we don't see are all of these new towns and NPCs that we've been promised in the new computer game.

There is only one town in the game, Waystruck, and the NPCs are basically the same as those in *Diablo I*. The plot of the six adventures is actually lifted primarily from *Diablo I* too. In addition to that, there are plenty of spells, items, and monsters left out of this simple version. It seems that the folks at Blizzard are only looking to whet our appetites.

Nonetheless, the game is very cool. For beginners and *Diablo* players looking to check out this whole "**D&D** thing," it's a very good and easy-to-learn intro. For experienced players it runs more like a simple one-shot game, but it still contains loads of fun, especially if you're a fan of either of the *Diablo* computer games.

Of course, once you're done playing this one, there will be more on the way. WOTC has released ***Diablo II: The Awakening***, a full source/adventure book that incorporates *Diablo II* fully into **AD&D 2nd Edition** Rules, along with this boxed set, and an ***Alternity/Starcraft*** crossover is promised for July. If all goes well, then WOTC has promised us even more supplements down the road.

--Jon Thompson

Pyramid Review

Ananasi (for Werewolf)

Published by White Wolf Studios

by Brett Brooks and James A. Moore

128 Pages; $17.95

The Changing Breed books for *Werewolf* have always been a step or two above most of their less exotic relatives. This is in part due, no doubt, to the extremely high cool factor of the subjects of the books (I mean, come on. We're sick of werewolves. Bring on the talking rats already!). But in general the books have also been of actual high quality as well. This book is no exception.

Ananasi are were-spiders. They walk around, looking like people, and when they get mad they turn into huge spiders. Or huge spider/human monster-types. Or hordes and hordes of little spiders (known to the layman as the *ohmygodlookhowmanyspidersthereare* form). As mentioned earlier, the "kewl"ness of this book goes right off the chart.

There's a real effort in this book to make the Ananasi unique, though, and to set them apart from the hordes of were-lions/bears/lizards/anteaters and so on who populate, seemingly, every nook and cranny of the World of Darkness. And they mostly succeed, making the Ananasi a joint creation of the various aspects of cosmology in the *Werewolf* universe (namely the Weaver, Wyld and Wyrm, although not in that order). One of the upshots of this aspect of arachnid existence is that they get to make the rote retelling of the history of the world at the beginning of the book substantially different and more interesting than those which have appeared in previous Changing Breed texts (it's from the first person perspective, if nothing else. . .).

Following the history lesson, we are treated to a thirty page discussion on what it is to be Ananasi, covering politics, biology, geography and psychology. Apart from being well-written and in-character (it is composed in the manner of a series of lectures by a variety of Ananasi teachers), this section is actually very informative, and contains a lot of information useful in an immediate manner.

The character creation chapter follows. This is fairly typical, containing new gifts, a few rites, backgrounds, merits and flaws (which are especially cool, including such gems as Hive Mind and Gender-Morph), the Ananasi totem, Fylfots (fetishes) and Aspects. Aspects are the Ananasi version of Auspices, and look pretty good, in concept. Each Ananasi has a caste (warrior, priest or questioner) and an allegiance (to Wyrm, Wyld or Weaver), and the combination of these is its Aspect (each of the nine combinations also has its own name; e.g. a questioner allied with the Weaver is called a Gaderin).

Now here's the problem. Each of the nine aspects has a short (half-page or so) description. What this descriptions tells us, though, is not what makes members of said aspect tick, but rather what they *do*. . . from an outsider's perspective. For instance, we are told that the Gaderin are obsessive collectors. Which is fine, but we aren't told why they collect, what they hope to accomplish by acquiring butterfly specimens or the bodies of serial killers. Which is what, logically, anyone hoping to play a Gaderin would like to know. It's the problem same for most of the others. We are told in a number of cases, to paraphrase, that "members of this Aspect kill people and destroy stuff, apparently at random, but with an over-all goal in mind," but aren't given any clue as to what that goal is, or how they choose their targets. (Flip a coin? Orders from Ananasa? I have no idea.) Basically, to make use of the Aspects, you'll either have to have incredible tolerance for hack-and-slash, or brew up your own descriptions.

Finally, we have a couple of appendixes. The first is a fairly typical collection of player archetypes and notables in Ananasi society. Oddly, these examples provide more insight into the nature of the Aspects they represent than the descriptions of the Aspects in the previous chapter. In any case, this chapter is a fairly typical example of its ilk; the archetypes are playable, but not exceptional, and the notables readable and perhaps even usable, without grabbing the reader's attention.

Appendix two, though, is far more interesting. It opens with a section on real spiders, going over the basics of anatomy. Which, although a nice idea, is easy to skim over and forget about. Following this is a section titled "Clarifications: the Truth Behind Belief" which is meant to give an objective view to a book that has been, up until now, from the Ananasi point of view. I'm not sure if I approve. While this section could be of interest to a GM, it's certainly not the sort of thing I would want my players to stumble onto while reading up on real-life spiders. Plus, I generally prefer not to know what it has been decided the canonical "truth" would be. But these qualms are mostly personal preference. This section is well-written, and not so expositive as to ruin the inherent mystery surrounding the guiding forces of the Werewolf world.

Which wraps up the chapter-by-chapter. On to the full-book overview. Visually, breed-book *Ananasi* holds together quite well. The art is quite good, although it will do nothing for your arachnophobia, and layout holds together very well (there is very little blank space between chapters). The opening comic, while not especially good, doesn't reach the gut-wrenching heights of badness that have been achieved elsewhere in the line (<cough> Hengeyokai <cough>). Organization gets a bit strange, however. Nothing is repeated in this book, which means that since there is a description of the various Ananasi forms buried in Chapter Three, there is no description at all in the character creation chapter, for instance, and anyone wondering what the Pithus form looks like (hint: big bloody spider) will have to go looking.

The *Ananasi* book continues the breed-book tradition of readable, and usable, splatbooks. And it continues in White Wolf's tradition of prettiness. This book is more than detailed enough for an all-Ananasi campaign, and would be invaluable in rounding out existing arachnid NPCs. Be warned, however, that the Aspects will need a bit of work. Otherwise, this is a good buy.

-- Ryan Elias

Immortal Airship Masters of the Andes!

"And now, who is this Robur? Shall we ever know?
We know to-day. Robur is the science of the future. Perhaps the science of tomorrow! Certainly the science that will come!
Does the Albatross still cruise in the atmosphere in the realm that none can take from her? There is no reason to doubt it. Will Robur, the Conqueror, appear one day as he said? Yes! He will come to declare the secret of his invention, which will greatly change the social and political conditions of the world."
-- Jules Verne, *Robur the Conqueror* (1886)

And you thought the [Antarctic Space Nazis](#) were warped. And don't get me wrong; they are. Regardless, they're still understandable, still clearly villainous. But these new guys, these immortal alien Rosicrucian airship technocrats, are so bisociative they don't even have a name. They might be the "Council of the 98"; they might be Le Brouillard; they might be the NYMZA. They could be a steampunk Shangri-La or Rosicrucian Blood Guardians or an outpost of Alien Nazi Supermen, or all three. And like so many great stories, theirs begins in the American West, in the shimmering heat distortion of the desert skies.

"Taking Dellschau seriously for the moment we might postulate that in both Germany and the United States, specifically in California and New York, a secret cult of brilliant scientists, technicians and inventors established contact with nonhuman agencies which told them how to construct aerial vessels but ordered them to keep the work under wraps. It is safe to assume the German and American branches were in communication and about 1848 some of the Germans immigrated to pool their efforts with those of the Americans."
-- Jerome Clark and Loren Coleman, "Mystery Airships of the 1800s," *Fate Magazine*, June 1973

About 45 miles west of Stockton, California, a small multinational clique of designers was building airships. Nothing too unusual about that, except that (assuming it was happening at all) it was the year 1850. And that the airships, or "aeros," of the Sonora Aero Club flew (as long as we're assuming things) using an energized antigravity gas known only as "the suppe" or "NB." The Sonora Aero Club designed possibly as many as 200 separate airships, of which possibly 20 or 30 actually flew during its 11 years of operation. The Aero Goose, designed by Peter Mennis, was the greatest of these craft, but all of them were decades ahead of their time, even without the antigravity gas. Mennis died in 1861 or so (possibly taking the secret of the NB with him) and the Aero Club scattered across America. (Making its membership a swell hook, as villain or patron, for *GURPS Old West-Steampunk* games.) One of its members, Carl August Albert Dellschau, moved to Richmond, Texas in 1865, and swore a loyalty oath to the Union for some reason -- could the Sonora Aero Club have been the secret weapon that San Franciscan Asbury Harpending was counting on to sieze California for the Confederacy in 1863?

Shortly after the [Great Airship of 1897](#) buzzed both San Francisco and Texas, Dellschau began drawing the aeros in a series of sketchbooks, accompanied by ciphered and coded notes in archaic German and English. The notes emphasized that the Club was under the control of the "DM=XØ," a secret society that Navarro translates as "NYMZA." Dellschau hinted that they killed Jacob Mischer, a Club pilot who wanted to reveal the aeros to the outside world. He had filled more than a dozen large books with his records and drawings before he died in 1923. Forty-five years later, by pure chance art history student Mary Jane Victor rescued four from a junkshop and displayed them as "folk art"; the designs attracted the attention of local UFOlogist Peter Navarro, who bought the surviving copies from the junk shop and drew the immediate connection between the Sonora Aero Club and the Great Airship.

In addition to the geographical and aerodynamic connections, one of the names Navarro found in the notebooks was "Tosh Wilson," a member of the Club who devoted his life to recreating NB. He succeeded some time in the late 1870s, apparently -- contactee George Dunlap described a "Mr. Wilson" as pilot of the Airship in Beaumont, Texas, in 1897, and said Wilson told him the airship ran on a "secret gas" extracted and harnessed by electricity. Dunlap described the airship pilot as a "young genius" -- which was the description the former sheriff of Fort Worth used for an experimenter named Wilson he recalled from 1877. "Wilson" hadn't aged for twenty years -- forty, if Dellschau's notes are to be believed. That's some gas.

"My God, now that I think of it, all of Verne is an occult revelation . . . Verne gives even more explicit signals. Robur le Conquérant, R.C., Rosy Cross. And Robur read backward is Rubor, the red of the rose."
-- Belbo, in *Foucault's Pendulum,* by Umberto Eco

But leaving Wilson aside for a bit, doesn't the notion of a secretly-constructed electrical airship running on a mysterious power source put one in mind of Robur's *Albatross* from Jules Verne's *Robur the Conqueror?* Robur, like the Sonora Aero Club, built his device on an isolated plateau in America despite being of multinational and mysterious origin himself. French theorist Michel Lamy points out the "R.C." symbolism in Robur's name and title, identifying Verne as part of a secretive Rosicrucian group known as Le Brouillard, "the mist." (Whence, of course, we get Phileas *Fogg*.) Verne was, in fact, connected with the mysterious "Nadar," a French photographer, balloonist, and leading member of the Society for the Encouragement of Air Travel via Heavier Than Air Vehicles. The Rosicrucians (like mist) were invisible, and (like Nadar and the Sonora Aero Club) they studied advanced scientific developments and (like Robur) kept them secret on island bases, or so says Sir Francis Bacon, who ought to know, in *The New Atlantis.*

You want more? Verne describes the flag of Robur as stars on black surrounding a "golden sun," which calls to mind the explicitly Rosicrucian magical order the Golden Dawn, which debuted the year after Verne wrote *Robur the Conqueror.* The Golden Dawn got its authorization from mysterious coded letters from a "Anna Sprengel" in Germany -- and Dellschau also received letters in the same time period from a "Mary Sprengel" in Germany. Where there were also "airship" sightings in the 1850s. Was this the work of the NYMZA's European branch? And did the NYMZA have anything to do with the murderous attempt on Verne's life the same year that *Robur* was published, as if warning him that he had revealed a little too much?

"In the esoteric writing of the Latin countries, Marconi has achieved a near-legendary status, much as Tesla has recently in the United States. But most Tesla students are unaware that Marconi was supposed to have founded a secret high-tech city in the remote southern jungles of Venezuela."
-- David Hatcher Childress, "Tesla & Marconi," *Atlantis Rising*, Fall 1997

The spark now jumps from Verne to Marconi, the man credited with inventing the radio (by infringing on Tesla's patent) and who certainly made a great deal more money off of it than Tesla did. Marconi also had his wild side, experimenting in radio communication with other worlds on his laboratory-yacht, the *Electra*. He did, in fact, report such contact "from another star" in 1921, and in 1930 succeeded in transmitting electrical power over distance, replicating Tesla's efforts in that field as well. Marconi even has a "death ray" story, although it comes bisociatively in both pro- and anti-Marconi versions. He either offered Mussolini his death ray in 1935 and was only talked out of it by the Pope, or refused to turn his research over to the fascists and faked his death in 1937, escaping on his yacht (now stocked with Tesla and Marconi antigravity technology) to South America with 98 like-minded believers, all top-notch scientists. Using their mighty skills, they built a secret city in the Venezuelan Andes (possibly harnessing Atlantean technology to do it) to guarantee world peace.

This Council of 98 is just swimming in wealth; not only from Marconi patent royalties but from the secrets of matter-transmutation, revealed to them by the alchemist Fulcanelli, who disappeared in 1932 -- only to show up in the Council's secret lair six years later. Like Robur, the Council builds advanced airships; like the Rosicrucians, they keep them to themselves. And like Wilson, they're immortal, made so by Fulcanelli's elixirs. Or by exposure to NB. Or by their Bloodline -- "Wilson" adds kabbalistically to 156, "Zion" -- implying that Le Brouillard is a subsidiary of the *Prieuré de Sion.* Or, of course, by aliens; famed UFOlogist "Branton" identifies the "Marconi Group" as allied with the "Tall Blonds" -- the Nordic aliens, in other words. Hmmm. Is it just a coincidence that the Sonora Aero Group also had a jet-propelled craft known as the *Dora,* just like the Antarctic Space Nazis? Or that Robur is thought to be an Argentine exile? Do the Council folks send a disc-ship over to their neighbors in the Nazi [El Dorado](#), Akakor, to borrow a cup of NB every now and again? Maybe the Council isn't quite so anti-Fascist as they'd like you to think.

"However, an article in the British publication The Independent *claims the incidence of suicide among Marconi scientists is twice the national average of mentally healthy individuals. Either Marconi is hiring abnormally unstable scientists or something is very wrong."*
-- "Addendum to Alternative 3," author unknown

And the NYMZA are either still at that murdering people game, or the Council is doing a lot better job of faking people's deaths to recruit them to run the secret base. Twenty-two scientists and technicians working on SDI in Britain between 1982 and 1988 either committed suicide, died mysteriously, or simply vanished -- virtually all of them either Marconi Company, Ltd., employees or contractors. (For those with a yen for Masonic paranoia, two of them were hanged, and two died under a bridge. One of each type died in Bristol, 100 miles from their job or home.) That makes a great start to either a *GURPS Illuminati* or *GURPS Espionage* game (or both, heh heh heh), as well as being an odd echo of an *Avengers* TV episode. But can even Emma Peel and John Steed defeat the Immortal Airship Masters of the Andes? And should they? Only the GM knows for sure -- and the immortal Dr. Wilson, of course.

The Story's the Thing

Goal-oriented games are simple enough to understand: the characters go into a dungeon, kill some smaller bad guys, pummel a major bad guy, and walk off with his treasure. Alternatively, in a popular Super Hero twist, the characters break into the super secret lab of the evil mastermind, pummel some mooks, put the mad scientist out of his misery, and make off with his weapon of mass destruction. Wash, rinse, and repeat.

Sound familiar?

If this isn't storytelling, and the chicks aren't digging this, what *should* we be doing? Should we even be bothering trying to introduce women to gaming if this style of gaming doesn't work? After all, the dungeon crawl has worked for nearly twenty-five years! It's a perfectly functional standby!

Most women seem to be searching for *story* oriented games instead of *goal* oriented games. There's plenty of psychological spin as to "why," but it comes down to a simple fact: women want to be involved in the plot on a personal level. They want to feel involved in the story. They don't want to be on another adventure trucking through a dungeon, wondering how they can carry the monster's horde of gold with a backpack. It's not limited to women, either. Many guys are interested in going beyond the dice.

Luckily, it's not too difficult to run a story-based game if one keeps in mind a few pointers while constructing their periodic campaigns. The elements of a good story-based roleplaying game are system-less and genre-less. They can be used in any setting, and in nearly any game. Best of all, they're not hard to follow. Toss in a few of these, and not only will the chicks stay, but all the players will receive a richer gaming experience.

One: Recurring Non-Player Characters That Players Care About

The best way to start getting characters excited about the storytelling process is to build NPCs to whom the characters feel emotionally attached. These can be friends, significant others, family members, coworkers, liege lords, faction buddies, or anyone else with which the characters would have a reason to spend time. These make great plot centerpieces: a kidnapping of a family member will emotionally charge a dungeon crawl, an attack on a fortress controlled by one's faction will spur the players to the hinterlands to fight the encroaching hordes for God and glory, and assault on one's friends will get the characters out to kick some booty.

Great NPCs don't necessarily have to be friends and family. A great villain who taunts the PCs at every turn can make the game every bit as emotionally charged as a romantic lead. A character that gains the trust of the players only to betray them later can lead to some great and powerful roleplaying.

NPCs are more then simple set pieces; they're the energizers of the stories that draw the characters into a web of adventure, intrigue, and betrayal. Make them seem like they're alive, and the story will breathe on its own.

Two: Character Backgrounds

The best stories are those with fully fleshed characters whose backgrounds live and breathe. While a player should spend plenty of time working out a character's statistics and abilities, just as much time should be devoted to building a character's background. Not only does it provide convenient story hooks for the GM to involve the character, it provides the characters motivations, his feelings - even his reason for being. Can a grizzled detective be as cynical and jaded if he didn't lose his partner to a nasty criminal and leave the force? Can a superhero lack a genesis story? Can the gunslinger take down the varmints who killed his wife and children if none exist?

Backgrounds are what differentiate the character as a piece of paper and the character as a living, breathing entity. The fleshed-out character will find more motivations for following (or not following) the plotline, interacting with the other

characters in the party, and being part of the story. They'll seem more *real* in the context of the story, and story is what the game is all about. Most importantly, the player, knowing the character's background, will care about their character, and this will bring them deeper into the story line, providing a richer gaming experience for everyone.

Three: Break the Rules

There usually comes a time when the GM, while plotting out his game, comes against a wall. Before him is a thorny decision: does he continue to build the tapestry of his plotlines of his story even if it violates some of the rules of the game?

The answer is to break the rules. They're a good guideline for a game, but they aren't the game itself. The GM should be ready to toss whatever he doesn't need out the door in a moment's notice. It's always better to have a good plot twist or a better story villain than to feel constrained by statistics. The story is the most important aspect of a story-telling game, so when the rules get in the way, go ahead and toss them into the circular file. After all, the game master can do anything he wants to the game world in the spirit of a fine storytelling experience.

Four: Going Beyond Killing Foozle

Many roleplaying adventures base themselves on the "kill Foozle" premise, where the players build up their equipment and experience fighting smaller monsters until they are ready to take out the big bad guy who has the biggest weapons and best treasure. This works wonderfully for computer roleplaying games, but the medium of gaming allows players to go beyond hunting and killing Foozle, into uncharted territory.

Do not discard conflict, however! Conflict is at the very core of the structure of any story, be it a work of fiction or a roleplaying game. The dynamics of character vs. character, character vs. NPC, or character vs. the world are all important elements, not to be cast-off because the GM is trying to be "touchy-feely." Many elements of story telling involve the characters talking, thinking, and roleplaying their way out of situations, and *this* process drives the tale to its inevitable conclusion. The GM should feel free to sprinkle other forms of conflict into his game to spice up the storyline along the way. A few example story elements are:

- **Politics:** Politics are a force for fine storytelling. The stakes at risk are large: power, money, and the lives of thousands, if not millions. The finagling in the back room, the deals made, the backstabbing, and the betrayal -- it holds a certain fascination with people, especially those who like an element of competition in their games. A game master with a strong set of non-player characters; a fully fleshed out world and a ruthless batch of players can really take advantage of politics to drive strong story based games.
- **Interpersonal Conflict:** Be it factions, philosophy, religion, or the color of pants, there is always that which separates people. It can be used as a tool of the game master to create a setting for conflict between the non-player characters and the characters themselves -- almost a wedge between people, giving them something to fight over, fight for, and win. A difference in philosophy and belief can energize a setting, and bringing a character's beliefs to the fore can make a player feel like they can find a deeper meaning in a roleplaying world.
- **Intrigue:** Intrigue can be the pursuit of higher knowledge and power, the search through ancient documents to uncover the ancient mystery or uncovering a conspiracy. The chase for the truth about UFOs and the subsequent government cover-ups can drive a story. So can the truth about Elvis. A tapestry of clues, hints, and tales require almost no combat, but can pull a set of characters into the plot and keep them there, fascinated for session after session.
- **Romance:** No one wants to talk about adding in the element of romance into his or her game. It almost feels "girlie" to throw in a romance, but they're a strong tug on the character's, and the player's, emotions. When a boy meets a girl, the dynamics of the party change, and sometimes change dramatically. Around a romance, a game master can build all sorts of plots -- intermarriages, kidnappings, even wars. It's a great hook for a scheming game master to get his hooks into and drive his plot.

Five: Hiding the Railroad Tracks

One of the great challenges facing a game master is to build an adventure that is interesting for the players and still provides hours of fun. There is a temptation to script the adventure, NPCs and all, from beginning to end, providing a cohesive "module" of a game. After all, modules were the way of roleplaying adventures since the beginning of time, and what was good then is clearly good now.

The problem is that, while modules like *Return to the Keep on the Borderlands* and its ilk is certainly fun, it doesn't pull together for a cohesive story that features the main characters as their centerpieces. There's too much pre-scripted plot. The trick is for the characters to go beyond the prepared material and start building the story themselves. The characters need enough slack in their leashes so they feel that they are important to the storyline, not the other way around. But at the same time, the game master can't give up his or her plotline either, because then the game doesn't feel like it has any coherence, and the players will go off to go do their own character-based things.

The best way to achieve this delicate task is to do three things:

First, design open, event driven games. Events get the players involved in the storyline easily, and with the right NPCs, in a personal, intimate way. Deadlines are wonderful motivators for getting players to follow a story while still feeling the freedom to do whatever they feel they need to do as player characters. So are other plot devices that make the blood flow: kidnapping of significant others, murders, thefts, or other crimes that can involve the group as a whole without making them think that this is anything more than the meat of the game.

Second, never fret about the little details. What is important is the Big Picture. It never matters what the characters wear, or eat. In addition, allow the characters to talk to any NPCs they wish within reason. The characters should be free to be characters. Allowing the player characters as much freedom in the details as they want always creates the illusion that the players are in total control of the plot.

Third, although you, the game master, might be laying down plot "train tracks" for the characters to follow, always make it look like the characters wanted to make the decision to follow the plot in the first place.

Five Steps to Bind Them

These five steps don't, in any way, cover every single way to create a story-based game. Nor does it give explicit instructions for anyone's personal game or genre -- that's what game masters are for! Think of these steps as good guidelines to follow. Think it will make your game better? Great! Doesn't work for your game? Ignore the advice. Like all advice, it's worth about what you pay for it.

Trying some of these tricks may keep that single woman player coming back to the gaming table. If she's emotionally involved in the story, she's going to want to come to the sessions. If she really likes the game, she might start making noises about bringing some of her friends. (And that's what we all want, right?) After a while, she might start to run games herself.

One last piece of advice, though: like the individual characters, the game world is your NPC. Do with it as you like. The point of the game is to have fun for everyone.

Time to Blow Up the World Again

or, The Etch-a-Sketch Syndrome

Look, I find it hard to believe that I'm the only person who routinely blows up the world. I admit I have a problem, but what else am I supposed to do? I mean, sometimes you just have to raze all of creation.

Oh, it begins innocently enough. I start up a campaign, get some players, create a universe. But something happens. Each week the PCs run into someone new. . . make some new enemies, earn some new contacts, visit new places, create new plot threads.

Things go great for a while. But, invariably, after a while the campaign hits critical mass. The characters know too many people, hold too many options, throw too many balls in the air. After a while the sessions look like this:

GM: "Okay. The Good Witch informs you that you have to move the Bauble of Truth across the continent in one week, or everyone is doomed.

Player 1: Okay. Well. . . we'd better be on our way, then. . . and quickly!

Player 2: Wait! Why don't we take it to our allies the Weed People?

Player 3: Yeah! They have the power to move among weeds! Surely there must be weeds on the other side of the continent.

Player 2: As a backup plan, we can call the Portal Weaver. She still owes us a favor for helping her father.

Player 1: That's right! At the very least, she should be able to create another Null Time portal to give us more than a week.

Player 3: And maybe we can rally our allies the Werewoofs!

And so on.

Invariably, in a large enough campaign, I feel the urge to pull the plug (albeit on a limited basis). . . to have some Cataclysm on Many Earths, some Great Scourge, some Big Ol' NPC Roundup. Sure, I run these storylines because they're exciting, but deep down I usually get the germ of the idea because, after a while, there are too many options for the PCs.

Young Steven: Why were there Clone Wars?
Steven's Mom: Too many Jedi.

I wish I knew *why* I need to resort to blowing up the world. I think it's because, to me, the most fun I have as a GM is when the players interact with NPCs. . . and that usually means creating new NPCs each week. Unfortunately, I tend to believe that, for the NPC interaction to *mean* anything, the NPC has to have some impact on the PC's lives. Whether that's professional, personal, or something else, it's still a new thread that needs to be woven. So a seemingly routine adventure can become bogged down with requests to:

- Ask Mentor NPCs for advice.
- Request help from Ally NPCs.
- Inform NPC Romances what's going on.
- Check to see if there is word of any Enemy NPCs.

Etc.

Soon, as a GM, I become bogged down with these minutia; touching these aspects of the past to solve problems, while satisfying to the puzzle-solving side of players, wreaks havoc with the dramatic pacing of an adventure. So every so often I find myself, as GM, needing to turn the game world upside-down and shake vigorously.

Now, in books, comics, and TV this is often accomplished within a character's motivations and actions; the protagonists accept a posting to a new Secret Organization that makes them disavow all ties to their former lives. The good guys move from New York to LA, with exciting new adventures ahead of them and three seasons of continuity baggage behind them. The spaceship leaves the planet's episodic orbit, boldly forgetting contacts and solutions they reached before. But my players tend to dislike letting go of their pasts. Couple this with the fact that my players tend to *hate* anything bad happening to them (a phenomenon I'll tackle in a future column) directly, I'm forced to reboot the world.

 The Weed People?   Killed by the Boogiemen.
 The Portal Weaver? Killed by the Boogiemen.
 The Werewoofs?   Killed by the Boogiemen.

A legion of shadows fall over the PCs; it is the Boogiemen. Vengance can belong to the players, but the damage is done.

And afterwards, here's the Bauble of Truth; you have one week.

For the most part I've worked around this limitation by only running mini-series (campaigns that are designed to last a limited number of sessions) or guest-GMing other folks' campaigns I've played in. But each time I start up a new open-ended campaign, I just *know*, at some point, I'll need to blow up the world.

* * *

For folks submitting articles for consideration, *please* put contact information on *every* article. It takes you thirty seconds it takes you to type out your name, address, e-mail address, SS#, and how you want to be paid; it takes me five minutes to look it up and hope it's all still correct.

Thank you.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Manual of the Planes** (for **AD&D 1st Edition**), page 39.

(three stars) "The character might be saved by the most miraculous of coincidences. He may stumble upon Mister Big accidentally, or have a terminal fall broken by a huge pile of rubber bands that just happen to be in the right place."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Spirit Warriors (for Hell on Earth)

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Written by John Hopler

128 pages, $20.00

Spirit Warriors is the latest in the line of sourcebooks for Pinnacle's *Deadlands: Hell on Earth* setting. Having already covered mutants, psychers, cyborgs, junkers, templars, and road warriors, this time around they take a look at shamans. But don't expect a simple rehash of the original *Deadlands* shamans. Where the old west shamans worked with nature spirits to work their magic, the shaman of the Wasted West deal with toxic (aka pollution) spirits.

That's right, in addition to the classical four elements, PEG has now given us the four spheres of pollution: Radiation (fire), Sludge (water), Smog (air), and Trash (earth). They also throw in Insect Spirits as a kind of miscellaneous extra category. Thanks to all the environmental, radioactive, and supernatural damage caused by the Reckoning, a whole new species of spirits exists which want nothing more than to turn the entire world into Love Canal. As if having the Four Horsemen running around loose was not enough of a problem.

The book is laid out in the standard PEG *Deadlands/Hell on Earth* format. First is the Posse Section, done in the form of an interview with a Toxic Shaman, which provides some more of the history of the Wasted West setting, updates the status of the Indian nations, and fills in a few more pieces of the setting's backstory. It also describes the two types of Toxic Shamans (Caretakers and Corrupters). As the name suggests, the Caretakers are trying to clean things up and the Corrupters just want to make things worse.

While the idea of pollution spirits and the shamans who deal with them is certainly an interesting one, this book reminds me a lot of the whole Defiler/Preservers problem in TSR's *Dark Sun*. For those unfamiliar with the setting, there were two types of mages: Defilers who took the energy they needed for their spells from the environment, leaving it lifeless, and Preservers who made the effort to only take a little. The Defilers were more powerful and easier to run, which resulted in a lot of people wanting to play one.

By the same token here, the Corrupters get power by causing pollution, something fairly easy to accomplish, while the Caretakers work by cleaning it up. The problem within the game is that the toxic spirits both Shaman types get their powers from have the express goal of wanting to pollute the entire world. But while the Corrupters spread pollution with their powers, the Caretakers actually clean it up by channeling it directly to the spirits (giving them something of a pollution-high). The book tells us that the spirits fall for this because they can't resist the rush, but given that the spirits have the express goal of polluting the planet, the rationale for why they would give power to people devoted to cleaning things up seemed a bit thin.

The narrative voice in this section just seemed a bit off. Where past *HOE* books have had very strong and unique voices within the Posse Section interview, this one just seemed inconsistent. The tone of voice and speech mannerisms shift a bit throughout, and the narrator never really achieves the believability of those found in the other books. For example, Jo, the narrator of the *Templar* book, is a very vivid character who leaps off the page. By the time you're done reading her section, most GMs should have no trouble running an encounter with her. Dirty Waters, the narrator in *Spirit Warriors*, on the other hand, never quite reaches that threshold of reality.

Next is the No Man's Land section, which contains the rules section. Here you can find everything you need to make a Toxic Shaman character, including all their nifty supernatural powers, called Favors. The Favors are divided into the

spheres for each type of toxic spirit, plus a general section which all shamans have access to. While the Insect Favors mostly seem to be variations of taking on the aspects of Insects (chitin, insect strength, spider sense, etc.), the elemental Favors provide an interesting range of abilities covering everything from causing cancer to turning into an amorphous blob. The Favors listed are varied enough in terms of scope and ability that GMs should not have much trouble determining the effects of any new Favors they want to create. Finally, several sample magic items are listed as well.

PEG never stints on the fun stuff in their books, and this section is no exception. With 15-19 Favors for each sphere, plus the 15 general Favors that any shaman can take, a large enough range of abilities is presented that every shaman can have his own bag of tricks. Though the Insect Shamans don't seem to have quite the range of abilities that the other shamans do, they make mean combat machines and still have a few unique tricks that make them stand out. The Favor that allows them to turn into a mass of cockroaches was particularly inventive. And while the Radiation Sphere does have a bit of overlap with the mutant abilities of the Doomsayers, there is enough difference that the two remain easily distinguishable.

Last is the Marshal's Handbook, which contains all the little secret stuff the players are not supposed to know about, expanding on the information given in the Posse Section and providing character write-ups for important NPCs and monsters.

This came across as the weakest section. While it might simply be that the previous books in the line have unveiled all the big mysteries of the *HOE* setting, PEG is typically very good about putting a few serious surprises into each book. That was not the case here. Pretty much everything in the Posse Section is the straight truth, with only a few minor details being off. No major secrets of the *HOE* metaplot are revealed, and no real advancement of the storyline is made. While there is certainly nothing wrong with a straightforward sourcebook, it was something of a let down after all the other sourcebooks.

Overall, however, *Spirit Warriors* is another excellent resource for any *Hell on Earth* game. Whether you are simply interested in the status of the Native Americans in *HOE*, or are looking for a character with a rather interesting perspective, you are sure to find something useful to work with here.

-- Andrew Ross

Pyramid Review

The Walking Dead (for Hunter: The Reckoning)

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

by Richard E. Dansky, Ed Hall, Michael Lee, and Adam Tinworth

120 pages, $15.95

Billed as "An Enemy Book for Hunter: The Reckoning," *The Walking Dead* explores and explains the proliferation of ghosts and zombies in the lands of the living. These undead beings are Hunters' greatest enemies, but seem to have some hidden connection to them. The nature of that connection -- and how to use it in a Hunter chronicle -- is only one of many topics covered in this surprisingly good volume.

I say "surprisingly good," because I was initially quite skeptical about this book. I've followed White Wolf's various World of Darkness games for several years now. I have a pretty good grasp of their ins and outs, as well as the back-stories that drive them. Consequently, I could easily guess the nature of the Walking Dead and the reasons for their sudden appearance in large numbers. I won't reveal the details here, except to say that they tie directly into the events that led to the demise of the *Wraith: The Oblivion* roleplaying game last year. Despite that foreknowledge, *The Walking Dead* still managed to offer up a few surprises. . . a fact I find doubly interesting, as I'll soon explain.

I was also skeptical about the format used for this book. Like all other books in the *Hunter* line, *The Walking Dead* is written as a series of faux e-mail messages among the participants on the secret mailing list by Hunters to exchange information among themselves. I understand the value of setting the proper mood in a roleplaying game, but this book contains over fifty pages of these in-character exchanges! Even so, the authors of these sections deserve some credit. I didn't find slogging through it nearly as painful as I should have - and I gleaned a lot of information along the way. That's pretty impressive in my book.

The art throughout is of uneven quality. Some of it was a bit cartoonish for my tastes, particularly given the subject matter. I very much liked Mitch Byrd's chapter-opening pieces. They're clean, dynamic illustrations with just the right feel. Of course, I find his seeming fixation on large-thighed women to be an oddity, but perhaps I'm just unaccustomed to seeing females of this sort in gaming products. The cover is yet another example of recycled art from the main Hunter rulebook, a practice I wish White Wolf would end before long.

The book itself consists of seven chapters, an introduction, and the obligatory fictional vignette at the beginning. Neither the introduction nor the vignette bears much thought. In fact, their inclusion is almost as pro forma as the use of lyrics from alternative rock bands and pop cultural touchstones was in earlier White Wolf products. If I had my way, I'd trade the vignettes for quotes from Oingo Boingo or Dead Can Dance any day. At least the quotes took up fewer pages which would be better served by game-related text.

The first six chapters are in the form of an extended dialogue between Hunters on their mailing list. As I indicated above, reading through the dialogue is not nearly as painful as I had feared. I chalk that up to the fact that the dialogue is more than just idle chatter; there is a plotline as well. The plot concerns the infiltration of the supposedly secure Hunter list by not one but two different examples of the Walking Dead. For their own reasons, these beings have chosen to reveal details about their kind, including how to defeat them. The narrative acquires some tension as the Hunters question both the motives and the veracity of the information conveyed.

The final chapter of the book is the longest and the only one to contain game mechanical information. It includes rules

using the Walking Dead in all their forms, as well as truckloads of Storyteller advice. The latter was especially welcome. As a line, I feel **Hunter: The Reckoning** has a very great need for examples and other illustrations. **The Walking Dead** provides just that. What I found most gratifying was the authors' acknowledgment (more or less) that **Hunter** takes place in a different World of Darkness than White Wolf's other games. That is, don't expect what's true in **Vampire** or **Mage** to hold true in **Hunter**. This is quite clear in discussing the power and abilities of the Walking Dead. Not only are they not exactly like those of **Wraiths**, but the book warns against using **Wraith: The Oblivion** extensively because "in many ways the game you'll play won't be **Hunter**." That statement may tick some people off, but I found it comforting. I only hope future releases will feel just as free to dispense with White Wolf orthodoxy for the sake of a good story.

More than anything, that's what impressed me about **The Walking Dead**: its willingness to go its own way to create interesting antagonists for Hunters to combat. Reading through the e-mail exchanges, I found my knowledge of **Wraith: The Oblivion** was as much as handicap as a blessing. The Walking Dead are not Wraiths, even if they derive from them. One of my many concerns about **Hunter** is its inability -- nearly a decade and hundreds of books later -- to present the World of Darkness as the great unknown Hunters are supposed to see it as. This book goes a long way toward rectifying that concern.

In the end, I like this book. It's a well-done examination of what amount to genuinely new foes, complete with their own powers and motivations. Were I to run a **Hunter** chronicle, I'd keep it out of the hands of my players. There's little sense in allowing the Walking Dead to become yet another set of easily recognizable statistics and behaviors. If **Hunter** is to survive and flourish -- and win over the skeptical -- it's going to need more books like this.

-- James Maliszewski

Pyramid Pick

Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies (for Big Eyes, Small Mouth)

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by Jim Crocker, David L. Pulver

124 pages, $15.95

This is how you write a supplement.

Why? Well, for starters, what makes a good supplement? First off, the book should be good enough that you want to buy it, but the underlying system should have been designed well enough that you don't *need* to buy it. In other words, the supplement should live up to it's name: it should supplement the gaming process, and not be an integrally necessary piece of it.

Second, the book should contain a wealth of background information and source material. By the time I finish reading a supplement on, for example, "guys-with-cars and girls-with-guns cops and robbers game," I should know everything I ever wanted to know about cars, guns, and the men and women who use them to catch crooks and rob things.

Finally, the supplement should work by itself, but also work in synthesis with the other supplements for a game. In other words, I should be able to pick up *Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies* and be able to use the book without suddenly discovering that I also need to pick up *The Complete Book of Cars* and *The Totally Insane Guide to Guns*. At the same time, though, if I decide to pick up The Totally Insane Guide to Guns it should add to my experience using Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies, and vice versa.

Needless to say, *Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies* (*HRGB*) succeeds at all of this with the fine polish of a new 'vette and the lightning impact of Colt .457. Even though it's twice as long as the core *Big Eyes, Small Mouth* (*BESM*) manual, at no point in time do you feel as if you actually needed to buy this book. At the same time, though, every single page is chock full of material so good that you will never regret, even for an instant, the hard earned cash you laid on the line to pick it up.

Basically the content of HRGB can be broken down into three categories: New Rules, Equipment, and Campaign Info.

New Rules. Character creation in the basic Tri-Stat System (on which *BESM* is based) is a process of seven steps. *HRGB* elaborates on how each of these seven steps can be tailored towards a campaign of octane action. An example of this is found in Step 4: Character Attributes, in which not only are all of the attributes in the core manual assessed as to their appropriateness in an *HRGB* campaign, but several attributes are specifically modified for easier use in such a campaign, and a set of brand new attributes are introduced.

But *HRGB* doesn't stop there; it also goes on to insert new steps and sub-steps into the character creation process, expanding and adapting it. The most notable example of this is the presentation of a skill system for *BESM* (which first made its debut in the stand-alone Tri-Stat game *Dominion Tank Police*). This skill system is not only dynamic, it also fits almost perfectly into the overall feel and nature of the game system as a whole. One would expect this type of thing to either feel like a completely tacked on addition or, alternatively, something which should have been included in the basic *BESM* manual to begin with. The truth is that you feel cheated neither in the skill system itself or its lack in the core rulebook -- an accomplishment that speaks highly not only of *HRGB*, but the Tri-Stat system as a whole.

Beyond the rules for skill resolution, the only other noteworthy addition to the basic Tri-Stat rules takes the form of a brief section describing genre combat, including a surprisingly wide array of optional rules and tweaks.

Equipment. A supplement about hot rods and gun bunnies which lacked a description of cars and firearms would, of course, be remiss. It should come as no surprise that **HRGB** lives up to the task admirably in Chapter 3: Boom and Vroom, tossing in bombs along with the titular autos and guns.

Not only is this section a sizable and well-researched portion of the book, it also excels at maximizing the value of everything it gives to you. By implementing a template system (so that, for example, the same set of stats covers not only an H&K MP5, but also an Ingram M10) they maximize their coverage. And all of this is backed up by rock solid research which is presented in a clear, easy-to-understand, and easy-to-use format for the GM.

This section is also a good example of the modular design to the **BESM** product line I was discussing earlier: In the **Big Robots, Cool Starships** supplement for **BESM** a complete vehicle construction system is presented for the game. Now, **HRGB** could have required the purchase of this separate book or, worse yet, simply reprinted the material. Instead, **Guardians of Order** have presented us with this entirely new template system, which is not only a better fit for the material covered by **HRGB**, but is also completely compatible with **BRCS** for those who want the added flexibility the complete vehicle construction system gives.

Campaign Info. Between the new rules and equipment guide, **HRGB** has already justified its existence as a supplement but it doesn't stop there. Jim Crocker goes on to provide a wealth of campaign detail. This material ranges from an overview of pertinent anime titles in the genre (such as *Gunsmith Cats* and *Riding Bean*); to a breakdown of campaign styles, themes, categoires and ratings (and how the rules can be tailored to each of them); to a set of character archetypes; to a stand-alone module; to (finally) an overview of firearm laws, motor vehicle laws, and bounty hunting and bail in America, Canada, and Japan (accompanied by a general description of "Law and Order in Japan" and America's Miranda Warning).

All of this material is immediately useful and pertinently selected; there's no deadweight to be found here, and it's organized and presented in an easily referenced and accessible manner.

Of course, nothing is truly perfect, and **HRGB** is no exception to this truism. The book has minor typo problems, particularly in the first few chapters. The new attributes added to **HRGB** have six levels (instead of the standard five of the core **BESM** rules); this works, but it lends an unbalanced feel to the system. Although the new skill system is excellent (as noted above), this particular presentation of it is definitely slanted towards an **HRGB** campaign. Clearly this isn't a flaw, but if you're picking this book up solely for the skill system you should go in with the knowledge that you're going to have to adapt it to other types of **BESM** campaigns.

But at the end of the day there is only one conclusion which can be reached: Guardians of Order was good to begin with, and with each new supplement they get better and better. **Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies** is a textbook case of "how to do it right" and it's well worth your time and money.

-- Justin Bacon

Excerpted from *GURPS Ogre* by Jonathan Woodward, to be published July 2000.

Art by Storn Cook

The empires of Paneurope and the Combine are familiar to all Ogre players, but the Nihon Empire is a mystery to many. This article presents the 21st-century history of the Empire and an overview of its status during the Last War.

History

In the late 2010s, an economic collapse (probably a secondary effect from ongoing conflicts in Europe and South America) began in the western Pacific Rim countries. Japan was not affected as severely as some nations, but the yen entered a brief period of hyperinflation. This triggered a series of protests against the Japanese government, propelling a large number of Neo-Traditionalists into power in the next elections. As the Neo-Traditionalists solidified their hold over the next decade and made fundamental changes in the Japanese constitution (which had been imposed on Japan at the end of WWII by the U.S.), a general sentiment grew that it was Japan's duty to take its place as supervisor of its unruly, chaotic neighbors.

In 2035, the Japanese government underwent fundamental restructuring from within, restoring the Emperor as more than a figurehead and discarding the last limitations of the old constitution. The new nation was known in English as *Nihon,* the name natives had used for "Japan" all along. The Empire began a series of relatively nonviolent, but inexorable, purges of Western influences, and dramatically increased military spending. Since the Combine still considered Nihon an ally, they made only token grumblings. The Chinese were busy elsewhere.

After several decades of preparation, the Nihon Empire began its conquest of the Pacific Rim in 2060. Technologically advanced ships and hovercraft surged across the Pacific; the Philippines and New Guinea fell with barely a struggle. Diplomatic protests came from all points of the compass. China, in particular, was startled and terrified by Japan's obvious technological superiority. China considered Nihon friendly for its efforts in ending the Sino-European War of 2046-2049, but still remembered the horrors of the Japanese invasion of China in the Second World War.

The Combine also protested, but wasn't prepared to commit to a war that might, at best, be between technological equals. Their new Ogres were unblooded, and no one wanted to risk them failing against Nihon might. The Pacific was a wide enough buffer for the moment. As to Paneurope, its objections were brief and vaguely tinged with hypocrisy. They were consolidating Europe at the time, and it was hard to fault Nihon for acting in the same way.

The Empire continued to absorb the island nations of the eastern Pacific, and in 2065 launched its first "cybership." These sea-going Ogres were clearly based on Combine cybernetic designs. Some had human crews, later phased out. The Combine tightened security at all Ogre assembly sites in an attempt to stop the espionage. Unfortunately, the damage was done. Nihon continued its own research into cybernetics, matching advances elsewhere through pure science where espionage failed.

With the unequaled might of the cyberships, Nihon conquered all of the southeast Asian nations except China, Korea,

and resolutely neutral (and startlingly well-defended)Singapore. By 2070, Nihon owned every island north of Australia and west of the international date line, and virtually all of the southeast Asian mainland.

In 2071, the Nihon Empire finally set its sights on China. Renewing claims made in 1910 and 1931, Nihon demanded the return of Manchuria and Korea. A half-hour after the ultimatum arrived in Beijing, large landings were made simultaneously at Pusan, Shanghai, and Tianjin. The Chinese military machine went into action, trying to drown the Nihon troops in infantry. Unfortunately, the Empire's dramatically superior technology proved sufficient to erase the Chinese numerical advantage. After establishing strong positions, the Nihon army paused to gather forces for the lengthy conquest of China. Over the next three years, the Chinese made dozens of attempts to dislodge the invaders. None succeeded.

Nihon's next major offensive was against Hong Kong, in 2074. Still one of the richest cities on the Pacific Coast, it was strongly defended by the Chinese army. Nihon suffered losses at first, but then its brand-new cybertanks reached shore. The Nihon "Steel Oni" was clearly inspired by the Combine's Mark III, but was faster and smarter, and incorporated new technologies, such as superwire antipersonnel guns. The defense was demolished, but the city was largely preserved. With the capture of Hong Kong, all Nihon forces pushed outward from their fortifications, merely slowed by the Chinese defenders.

Seeing the futility of committing more ground troops, the Chinese responded in a highly unorthodox manner. The remnants of their navy attacked Nihon military bases in the Philippines, seizing two at Manila and Iloilo. With the computers and communication equipment there, they began a vicious infowar. Since the Nihon strategists hadn't expected this sophisticated tactic from the "inferior" Chinese, the maneuver was surprisingly successful. Across China, Nihon units were misdirected and miscoordinated. Several instances of Nihon units destroying each other were recorded. Radical changes in protocols and enciphering techniques were required to stop the damage, and by then, the Nihon army's carefully timed plan was badly out of synch. It took years to fully recover.

The next decade was marked by marine combats in the South Pacific, hovercraft duels in the Indonesian archipelago, and whole battalions of armor lost in the jungles of Borneo and New Guinea. Occasionally the conflicts drifted farther south, pulling Australia into the fray. Nevertheless, China slowly lost ground. The Chinese were forced to retreat from the Philippines in early 2080, but their mission there had been accomplished.

In late 2085, the Nihon army was finally within sight of Beijing when the Chinese offered their final surprise. During the Siege of Beijing, China introduced their Dragon "cybertanks," units apparently equivalent to an Ogre Mark III. This was insufficient to save Beijing, however. The Dragons slowed the attackers only through sheer numbers; they were no match for the Steel Oni and new Steel Samurai (roughly equal to a Mark V). The siege lasted into early 2086, when Beijing fell. The few Dragons captured intact proved to be fakes manned by humans, with little more AI capacity than a typical armor unit.

With the loss of Beijing, the rest of China fell quickly. In 2088, the last remnants of the government collapsed, and Nihon quickly seized all provincial capitals. Nihon remained preoccupied with digesting its conquest until the end of the century.

The Nihon Empire During the Last War

This section presents a "snapshot" of the Empire circa 2080. In general, the information here holds true throughout the Last War.

In the last half of the 21st century, Japan set out once more on the road to conquest. The growing population, technologically skilled and accustomed to a high standard of living, required more space and a constant flow of raw materials. At the same time, Nihon saw its less developed neighbors as direly in need of its technology, its know-how, and (perhaps more important) its culture.

Geography

At the beginning of the Last War, Nihon consists of Japan proper, all of the Asian mainland east of India and south of China, and nearly every Pacific island north of Australia and west of the international date line. By the end of the war, it also controls China, Korea, and portions of Mongolia and Russia. Singapore is independent until 2085, when it quasi-voluntarily joins the Empire.

Government

All authority rests in the Heavenly Emperor, whose wishes are carried out by his lords and generals. The generals control their troops through a typical hierarchy of colonels, majors, and so on. The lords (*daimyo*) are businessmen who have been granted titles and given responsibility over a certain geographic or industrial area (e.g., the Daimyo of Telecommunications for the region of Shikoku). Daimyo are frequently placed in indirect competition with each other, creating a unique blend of capitalism and a centrally controlled economy. Conflict can be strictly economic, or involve assassins, sabotage, and corporate infowar.

The Nihon Empire

The hereditary "samurai" nobility is long extinct, but the word and the philosophy survive. A brave soldier, a hard-working daimyo, or a wise judge will be praised as "samurai" for putting their talents at work, not for themselves but for the Emperor and the people.

Citizens can also be ennobled for achievement in artistic, scientific, or athletic pursuits. These titles do not confer power as such, but the honoree will get preferential treatment in all aspects of life, and in turn is expected to be a role model and public figure -- an *idoru*. Camera-shy types who shun publicity do not get titles. Neither do dissidents or iconoclasts.

Culture

Nihon's society and its complex culture are one and the same. Both ritual and spontaneity are valued in every aspect of life, from the proper respect to show to one's parents, to how to appreciate the beauty of a flower arrangement. The particulars of this highly technological yet traditional culture are beyond the scope of this article, and both *GURPS Japan*, *Second Edition* and *GURPS Cyberpunk* are recommended to those interested.

Anyone, regardless of ethnicity, who lives by the rules of Nihon culture is "civilized," and will be treated well. Even an honest effort by the ignorant will be looked upon favorably. In the areas controlled by Nihon, natives who adopt Nihon ways-- or seem to -- will be treated with respect, perhaps to the annoyance of their neighbors. Nihon soldiers will be more respectful of enemy troops than of enemy civilians, because (as long as they behave honorably) the troops are something like samurai, obeying their leaders and fighting for their homeland, and their honor is more important than the fact that they are misguided!

Intentional rejection of Nihon culture is nearly equivalent to declaring oneself a barbarian. "Gaijin" is an insult, but it no longer has a racial connotation. It now means the same as the Russian "nikulturny" -- uncultured, rude, and obnoxious.

Quality of Life

In Nihon proper, life is quite comfortable. There are more super-rich and more poor than in the Combine, but no one

goes hungry and every child attends school. Nihon technology does a great deal with limited resources, and Nihon culture encourages frugality, efficient use of living space, and tolerance of one's neighbors. Large families are unknown; most couples stop with two children.

In Nihon, one's station can quickly be determined by one's style of dress. Schoolchildren wear uniforms, businessmen wear certain styles and colors of suits, service workers dress in gray. Daimyo often choose to wear robes in the medieval Japanese style.

By the standards of the rest of the world, Nihon citizens live in an astoundingly info-saturated culture. People listen to the radio, or watch television, or link to the infonets, 24 hours a day. They are never alone, even when they are by themselves. Some go their entire lives without disconnecting from the support and reinforcement of Nihon society in the form of popular music and rosy reports from the front.

Crime and Resistance

In the civilian population, justice is fair but strict. Punishment for even minor crimes can be severe, but the system works hard to ensure only the guilty are punished. Military discipline is far more severe; Nihon's troops are held to high standards of skill and obedience. It is understood that any dishonor can be wiped out by sacrificing oneself for the Emperor . . . but soldiers who take this path are expected to do so intelligently, waiting for a time when their sacrifice will aid their comrades rather than endanger them.

In the occupied nations, resistance to Nihon governance is common and difficult to crush. The Chinese alone outnumber Nihon ten to one; only vigilance, determination, and superior technology maintains the current state of affairs.

Clones in the Empire

In Nihon, important civil and military leaders may have themselves cloned. The child is known as *kuroon-tane,* "clone-offspring." A clone is raised as a member of the gene-donor's family. From an early age, the child is made aware of his status and the obligation it places on him. The traditional Nihon "duty-to-parents-and-ancestors" (*ko*) is increased for clones; they have only one parent, so they owe everything to him. The gene-donor may collect on this obligation at need, in the form of spare parts. A clone is expected to willingly give up organs, limbs, blood, etc., to his "parent" should the parent be injured or sick. This extends to organs the clone can't live without (e.g., the heart), though the parent may refuse to take things that far, or at least try to arrange for a cybernetic heart for his clone. Most Nihon clones are quite willing to sacrifice parts of themselves when the need arises.

As a rule, people only have one clone made. (The emperor is an exception, with as many as half a dozen clones at a time.) If one clone should be killed or "used up," a second one may be created. Clones are old enough to give blood or bone marrow transplants by age 5, but kidneys, lungs, and limbs are most successfully transplanted after puberty. Cases of clones posing as their gene-donor are rare, since clones are at least 20 years younger than their parents.

Cloning is slightly controversial in the Empire. The official policy is that it prolongs the life of important men who do the Empire's work, and thus is good. Nevertheless, it is a matter of personal choice, and many high-ranking officials choose against it.

Apart from the possibility of having to provide parts unexpectedly, a clone's life is little different from a normal citizen's. They are expected to remain physically close to their parent, in case of emergencies, so usually take occupations in the parent's office, military division, etc. A clone's social behavior is expected to be exemplary; since he is genetically identical to his parent, any fault in the clone is regarded as a potential fault in the parent.

Being a Nihon Empire Citizen

A complex web of duties (*on*) entangles all Imperial citizens. Some of these can never be lifted, such as one's duty to

the Emperor or to one's parents. Others are incurred temporarily, such as the duty to someone who helps you when you fall. A duty is a terrible obligation, and Nihon may sometimes *not* help each other, so as not to impose an obligation on the one helped.

Imperial citizens know that their culture and society represent the flower of civilization, combining a thousand years of tradition with the best that modern technology can offer. Everyone owes loyalty and reverence to the Son of Heaven, and every station in life has its own requirements. Honor lies in fulfilling those requirements. The mission of bringing this structure to the ignorant lay at the heart of the most advanced empire of the 21st century, and guided it through its conquest of more than a quarter of the world's population.

by Damien Wellman

Art by Art Today

Those who play the popular CCG *Magic: The Gathering* may have heard of "Mental *Magic*," a variant in which one plays with a deck composed of nothing but cards with their casting cost. When you play a card, you may name any card with that cost, if that card has not yet been named. This idea of keeping everything undetermined until the last minute can be applied to nearly any game of strategy. Here are three traditional games, "mentalized."

Mental Chess

Each player has 15 numbered tokens, such as checkers, plus a King. The King is placed on the usual square, with the tokens taking the place of the other chesspieces.

Any token may be moved as any legal chess move, but these moves must be consistent with any previous moves taken by that token. Once a token has made enough moves that mark it as a specific piece, it must be declared as that piece. So, if a token makes a Knight's move, it cannot be anything but a Knight. If a piece has made nothing but one-square Pawn moves, it could be a Rook, Pawn, or Queen. You cannot declare more pieces than legal for that type, so at most you could have one King (declared at the beginning of the game) one Queen, eight Pawns, and two of every other type of piece. A token that is captured without being declared is not considered anything for this purpose. Otherwise, the object remains the same - to checkmate the opposing King.

Neither en passant or castling are used in Mental Chess. Promotion still exists, but a piece must be declared as a Pawn before reaching the eight row and can only be promoted into a "free spot" in the line up; you can never have more than one Queen, or two of any other piece.

Mental Stratego

All of a player's pieces except for bombs and flags are considered "blank." Whenever one piece attempts to capture another, each player writes down what his piece is. Then, each player simultaneously reveals what he wrote down, and the attempt resolves normally. A piece so declared stays that way for the rest of the game, and much like Mental Chess, each player is limited to the usual amount of each type of piece.

Mental Risk

Begin the game with each player placing one army into a territory as usual until the entire board is claimed. However,

instead of placing the remainder of each player's armies, they are instead kept to the side in an "army pool." When a player attacks a territory, both the attacker and defender may choose to add any number of armies from the army pool to the territory. Resolve combat in the usual fashion. At the beginning of each player's turn, they must return all but one army in each occupied territory to the army pool Thus, if a player commits his entire pool to an attack, he will have no armies available to defend until his next turn.

For another variant, have one pool for each continent, and only armies from that pool can deploy on that continent.

Finally, if you are not familiar with Mental *Magic*, here are the rules that my group uses:

Mental Magic

Construct two decks of *Magic* cards like so: two cards with a W casting cost, two with 1W, two WW, one 2W, one 1WW, one 2WW, one 3WW. Repeat this sequence for each individual color (two R, two 1R, etc.). Also include two 1-cost artifacts, two 2-cost, one 3-cost, one 4-cost, and one 5-cost. Zero-cost artifacts and non-basic lands can be included if you wish.

Whenever you play a card, you may play it as a "Superland" that counts as a basic land (but not as any of the five specific types) and can produce any color of mana. A Superland can be made into any basic land at any time, but must remain as that land. Otherwise, you may name a card with the same casting cost as the card you are playing that has not yet been named this game and is legal to play at the time, "templating" it. (Nonbasic lands can become any nonbasic land.) The templated card becomes the named card for as long as it is in play.

Cards in the hand, library, or graveyard are considered "blank." Any effect that looks for a number of cards in those areas will always find zero. For example, a spell that had a player gain life equal to the number of creatures in his graveyard would give no life. Effects that bring a card from one of these areas into play can be cast, and the card fetched must be "templated" as normal. Spells that bring a card from the library to the hand (or the top of the library) cannot be cast unless they look for "any card" as opposed to a specific type.

You may want to restrict the useable pool of cards to a specific tournament format or set -- for example, only cards allowed in DCI "Standard" tournaments, or only cards in the basic set.

Fastbond is banned in all games of Mental *Magic*, since every card may be played as a land.

Isle of Women

by Ron McInnis

Art by Art Today

Islands of women appear in so many stories, they seem to be as common as lonely sailors. This particular one is set in *GURPS Greece*, but can be modified to suit any fantasy campaign.

The Island

In the South Aegean, beyond the Cyclades, lies a small rocky island. Sailors in this region will dream of the island repeatedly. . . strange, intriguing dreams of beautiful, enchanting women and piles of golden treasure. They will recognize the island the moment they see it. As they near the island, they feel a powerful pull towards it, and a mental compulsion to land (IQ to resist, with -1 per hour in sight of the island) and explore it.

The island is rocky, rising to cliffs, with no obvious anchorage. The sea is treacherous with sudden strong currents and hidden rocks. Landing is a -4 sailing feat. Sailing around the island requires sailing feats at -2 every hour. Shipwrecks are visible on the rocks. The wind seems to bring enchanting music of the voices of women singing. But perhaps this is a trick of the imagination. The party's best approach is to anchor off shore and swim for it. If any of the sailing checks is failed the ship is hulled on the rocks and the sailors are thrown into the sea. Due to the nature of the island, all shipwrecked male sailors will make their way safely ashore (even those who can't swim; a current carries them). Female sailors check as usual.

Once on shore, the sailors must scramble over rocks to reach the interior of the island. There is no water, and this is hot dusty work. The cliff is about 100 feet high but it is a gradual slope so climbing is not difficult. Once at the top, they see that the island forms a shallow bowl. At the center are green gardens, streams and pools of water, fruit trees, and an elaborate marble palace. They can hear the sounds of laughter and splashing in the water. As they come out of the rocks, they are met by a beautiful girl. She greets them each by name and tells them she is to take them to her queen.

The girl leads the heroes through the gardens to a great bathing pool. A number of beautiful young women are there; they have evidently just finished bathing and are dressing -- an incredible display of beauty. One woman is older and seems the most regal in bearing; she is the most beautiful. The girl who guides the heroes leads them to her and introduces her as Queen Arya.

Arya greets each hero by name and welcomes him to the isle of women. She extols the virtues of each hero; she seems to know them well and to have a very high opinion of them. She explains that the women are priestesses of the goddess of love and this is an island sacred to love. After a formal greeting, she says she and her maidens must retire to prepare a welcoming feast. She offers the heroes the use of her pool to bathe and prepare themselves after such a long journey. She is so charming and sweet that it is difficult to say no, and she does promise to resupply the heroes' ship with any needed goods. As they dress, the women show no shame or modesty. Their robes are costly, and they place on jewelry of great value. The Queen and her maidens refuse to say anything more, but say all questions will be answered at the welcome feast.

The heroes may bathe in the pool, and they will find its waters cool and very refreshing. Any minor wounds they have will be healed, and major wounds will show some improvement -- this water has magical healing properties. When they emerge from the bath, they find that their clothes have been removed and replaced by clean garments of high quality. Shaving and grooming tools have been left, as well as scented oils. A jar of fine chilled wine and goblets have been left, as well as a bowl of fresh fruit. The jar, bowl, and goblets are all made of gold.

After a time the men hear giggling from behind the plants, and several girls emerge. They welcome each of the men by name and give them a garland of flowers. . . and a welcoming kiss on each cheek. They announce the welcome feast is ready and lead the men to it.

The feast is in an expansive marble court, in the area before the marble building. The gardens begin here; there are fountains and the sound of water and the smell of flowers. A great table has been laid out, groaning with food. Roast pig is the center piece, surrounded by a bewildering variety of side dishes; fish, shellfish, fruits, and breads are the more recognizable creations. A variety of wines has also been laid out; these are of incredible quality. The dinner service is also made of solid gold.

Queen Arya will make a speech, welcoming the men to the island of love. She will name each and list some of their famous deeds. She says that the gods have sent them to the island to rest and recuperate. She invites them to join the feast and stay on the island as long as they like. "Our home is yours," she says.

Each man is seated on a couch with one of the women. The leader of the heroes joins Queen Arya on her couch. Younger women bring selections of food and wine from the table and serve the couples on the couches. Other women play music and sing softly in the background. And the feast begins. Occasionally women will dance elaborately to set music; this is the only formal entertainment. The men are encouraged to stuff themselves. Their companions are extremely flirtatious and seductive. The wine is potent and the food heavily spiced. The music, while subtle, seems strangely compelling. Some of the men feel as though they've been transported. One says that they must have died and gone to the Elysium fields without realizing it. The other men laugh but it has an uneasy sound.

The Wedding

As the evening progresses, the men get more drunk and infatuated with their dinner companions. Each of these women begins explaining to the men (in husky whispers) about a curious custom of the Isle of Love. The goddess favors couples, especially married couples. So it is the custom for visiting men to marry a woman of the island. This is only binding while on the goddess' lands, so it dissolves when the men leave the island, and ignores any marriage prior to the island. The goddess rules all men to be single on her island unless married by her priestess. If the men leave and return, they can even choose another wife from among the women of the island. Each woman most charmingly beseeches her companion to agree to this. It is bad luck for a single man to be on the island, for, she says through lowered eyelashes, "How can an unmarried man experience the full joy of love?" She makes her meaning very clear.

The queen will also press her argument with the leader of the heroes. If any of the other men agree, a girl runs to the queen and whispers it in her ear. She uses this to help sway the leader of the heroes. The ceremony itself is very simple; little more than an elaborate toast. If the leader still refuses, the queen will seem hurt, and explain that she arranged the feast assuming that the heroes were followers of love; how else had they found the isle? She'll ask if she's displeased him in some way or if there is some other girl he has seen that he would prefer. A trace of tears appear in her eyes. The leader really should agree. See troubleshooting if he or any of the heroes refuses to marry his partner.

Queen Arya will stand and announce the wedding ceremony has been agreed to. The serving girls will bring trays with bread and a large cup to each couple. The queen will smile lovingly at the leader of the heroes, then, dipping her fingers in the wine cup, she'll trace a curious sign on his forehead. The women on the coaches will do the same with their partners. If asked, they will explain that it is a love sign and is considered good luck. The queen will lead the women to swear to give the men their love, devotion, and fruitfulness. The queen prompts the men to swear to protect and cherish the women and give them their strength. Each couple feeds each other a bit of the cake and a drink from the wine glass. The queen pronounces them all married in the eyes of the goddess.

The women seem very excited by the marriage with much kissing and snuggling. The feast is drawing to a close at this point; everyone is stuffed, so the women begin leading their husbands off into the gardens. Each couple finds a secluded spot, lit by the light of the full moon which is now high overhead. They are clinging to each other and kissing as their passion grows in intensity. She has him lie down on the soft grass. She disrobes, and the moonlight surrounds her. For a moment, she seems to glow with the silvery light, then she joins him. The flowers and plants give off a strange perfume, the music from the musicians at the party still tinkles through the air, and the hero enjoys a night of

file:///D|/To%20Update%20Torrents/GURPs%20to%20OCR/pyramid_2000/2000/0601.2.html[11/12/2008 08:25:08]

epic passion.

The next morning the men will wake up lazily with their wives. They will feel relaxed and indolent. The women will hurry off to fetch more food or wine. The days and nights on the island pass much like the first night's feast. The women lay out a royal table of food and wine. They serve the men, waiting on them hand and foot. The men spend their days sleeping, making love, lying in the sun, being bathed or massaged, and listening to the women play music or dance. The food is excellent but strangely spiced, and the women are fond of burning incense while bathing or massaging the men. All this is drugged. For each day on the island, the men will experience a -1 to all ability scores. The first night of the wedding feast counts as day 1. The men will not notice this unless they are specifically testing their skills or abilities, and the women will discourage this. Any man who makes such a check will realize he's getting weaker, but he can't convince any man who failed the check. If he tries to attack the women, or get the men to leave the island, they refuse and will fight him if he persists. All the men under the spell of the island are determined to stay, and will fight their comrades to accomplish this. This effect should sneak up on the adventurers. Try to get them to commit to several days by describing the beauty of the women, the excellent quality of the food and wine, the sun bathing, dancing etc. Hopefully, by the time the men decide to leave, a number will fail their rolls and want to stay. Any man who wants to leave can do so. He will find the rocks on his way out to be treacherous and full of snakes, but nothing a Greek hero shouldn't be able to handle. For those who stay, the following days will continue in this idyllic manner.

Night of the Full Moon

30 days pass to the next night of the full moon. The women become very excited as this night approaches. They explain that this is an important festival of the love goddess. They won't give the men any details, as this is a surprise. The night of the full moon, they take the men to a special pool that the men haven't seen before. This pool is perfectly oval and sits in a steep depression. The walls are smooth, and everyone has to climb down a ladder to reach a small beach. The pool's waters are warm and mineralized; the taste is not unpleasant but it seems very relaxing. The women have prepared a feast, and they encourage the men to indulge themselves in every way. This food is heavily drugged and will cause men who fail a health check to slumber deeply. This should affect all the men present. When the men awake, they are on the beach alone. The women have gone up the ladder to the roof of the depression and have pulled the ladder up. It is midnight, and the full moon is high overhead and reflecting from the center of the pool. The moon seems unusually large and bright; its image fills the pool. The women call down reassuringly. They say this is all part of the festival and that the men should relax and drink more wine. The waters of the pool begin to rise. Within a few minutes they overrun the small beach that the men are standing on, and the men must swim. The walls of the depression are perfectly smooth and allow no handholds. The water will climb half way up the depression, bringing the struggling men close to the women, who are smiling and cooing comfortingly. Any man who manages to climb up will be pushed back in by the women. After a few minutes a current will be felt, first weak then stronger, sucking the men down underneath the water. Swim rolls must now be made a -1 cumulative per minute in the water. This should continue until all the men are under the water and drowned.

Terra Incognita: Isle of Women

If the men reach the top of the wall, the women will attempt to overpower them and throw them back in. The women are dressed differently now, wearing dark robes with strange symbols. The women are fantastically strong; ST, HT,

and DX are all at 15. They wrestle and fight with a staff at skill 18. In the men's weakened state, the women should be able to easily overpower them and throw them back into the pool. If the men get past the women, they will be hunted through out the night. The women will only seach in the settled areas of the central part of the island; although fleeing to the outer cliffs and rocks will allow the men to elude the women, these areas are swarming with snakes.

I can breathe underwater! In Greek and Celtic mythology one occasionally encounters heroes who can breathe underwater. These heroes will be pulled down a dark tunnel a great distance. Their comrades' drowned bodies will be pulled along with them. There's a disorientation effect and they're all dumped onto an island in a dark river. The bodies are being gathered up by figures in dark robes. These forms prove to be skeletal hags. The bodies will be gathered and thrown into a great fire pit that burns within a dark temple at the center of the island. A tall woman stands before the fire pit with outstretched hands. The smoke from the fire seems to flow into her. This is Hecate, here to receive the sacrifices of her priestesses. She'll not be pleased to be disturbed.

The best resolution will be for the men to decide to leave before the night of the full moon. The men can leave any time they wish; the women will not interfere in any way. They can even force men who want to stay to leave. These men will fight back, and if there are enough of them may chase the others off, but the women will not interfere. Once away from the island, the heroes' attributes will quickly return, 1-2 points a day, and full restoration will occur after seven days. Heroes who didn't want to leave but were forced off the island will develop a powerful addiction to the island; they will seek to return at every opportunity.

What's Going on Here?

These women are priestesses of Hecate, goddess of darkness, black magic and the turbulent sea. This island is sacred to Hecate and is a worship site and sacrifice center. The main Hecate cult is centered in Asia Minor and Minoan Crete, but this island is their holy center. Men are drawn to the island who are exceptional or heroic. It is Hecate who chooses them, and the honor the women pay them is not feigned. When the men marry the women, they are symbolically marrying Hecate, and in so doing become worthy sacrifices. When the men are sacrificed in the waters, they are being sent to join Hecate; this is done during the full moon, Hecate's sacred time. Much of the strength of the men flows into the women, giving them exceptional abilities. Pregnancies are very common from the visits of men to the Isle of Women. These always result in daughters with exceptional stats and advantages. Clerical investment and magery are common. The daughters are taken to the mainland to be raised at a Hecate worship center. When they reach adulthood these women are extraordinary individuals. Hecate also possesses the ability to see and hear through such an individual, and can manifest herself within the individual at will. This is an enormous advantage for Hecate, and the creation of these individuals is a major goal of her cult. Some say the strength and spirit of the heroes who die in the waters are transmitted to their daughters; regardless of the truth, these daughters are certainly exceptional.

The priestesses on the island rotate with the mainland priestesses every three years. It is considered a great honor to be chosen to serve on the island. Hecate usually chooses the priestesses herself, and informs the clergy of her choice in dreams. Most of the priestesses on the island, are daughters of former priestesses, conceived in the manner outlined above. As a group, these women are referred to as the Daughters of Hecate.

Female Adventurers

Female adventures have a very different experience on the island. As mentioned before, they are not pulled to it; the waves don't carry them onto the island. As the island is approached, they are not visited by appealing dreams. If anything, they are subtly warned away from the island.

Once on the island, visiting women are not affected by the debilitating influences of the food and drink. They maintain their ability scores and their senses. They will notice the men being affected, however. They'll notice that the men are getting weaker, slower, less intelligent, and show slurred speech and other signs of drug use. They'll have a hard time convincing the men of this, however. They will also notice changes in personality. The men grow more indolent and apathetic as the days pass, and seem more lustful and prone to pleasure seeking. The priestesses of the island are pretty, as a rule, but they are not the love goddesses the men describe them as being.

If a female adventurer has a relationship with Artemis or Aphrodite, she'll have disturbing dreams while on the island. The goddess or avatars of the goddess will appear to her and give vague warnings of danger. The goddess will urge her to leave. As the month progresses, another dream will occur, growing slowly stronger in intensity. The heroine will approach a temple at night. Inside, a shadow figure of a very tall woman waits her. This figure promises her knowledge, power -- what ever the character wants -- if she will join her. If she approaches the figure, or tries to see it clearly, the dream abruptly ends. If she ever accepts the offer, the queen will take her aside the next day, and initiate her into the cult. She must prove herself by taking a leading part in the sacrifice of her former comrades, but if she does this, the cult will keep its promise. The Hecate cult is quite powerful and can reward a useful member like an adventurer very well.

Women with a priestly background may notice that the priestesses of the island don't act like traditional priestesses of Aphrodite. They won't name her for instance, unless challenged to do so. The temple of Aphrodite is well maintained, but rather small. There are also signs to the keen-eyed that it is rarely used.

Clues

There are some other clues that alert heroes will pick up. The symbol traced on their forehead during the marriage ceremony is not a symbol of Aphrodite. Regular religion rolls will reveal this, while critical rolls will reveal it to be a symbol of Hecate. It's unheard of to have a marriage ceremony without invoking Aphrodite, as was done here. The women have charms and symbols on their clothing; again, a regular religion roll reveals they aren't those of Aphrodite, while a critical success reveals they belong to Hecate. Tracks around the island will indicate heavy usage of a circular pool in a depression a top a hill. The women deny using this and discourage the men from going there. Successful religion rolls reveal that these pools are sacred to the earth goddess, while critical rolls indicate that they are often used for sacrifice. There are also trails that lead off into the surrounding rocks and cliffs. If the heroes follow these, they will need to make several tracking rolls and brave the poisonous snakes that are plentiful on the rocks. If they succeed, they will track back to a cave entrance in a cliff face. The cave entrance is guarded by two women. If the men try to pass the women, they will delay them for a few moments; a large company of women, including the Queen, will come down the path and detain the men. The women will use all their powers of persuasion to prevent the men from entering the cave, claiming that it is taboo. If the men persist, they will find a strange dizziness overcoming them; they will seem to swoon and will wake up back at the central area. If the men can sneak past the women and get into the cave, they will find that it winds around a bit, then opens into a wide chamber containing a large and well-maintained temple to Hecate.

Troubleshooting

A player refuses to get married. He won't be forced. His partner will seem very hurt, but will continue to be friendly. Of course, he won't know the full joy of love. He'll be isolated from some of the goings-on of the island, but the women will still wait on him hand and foot. One woman will try to develop a special friendship with him and get him to trust her. He can change his mind and marry at any time. The women will continue to be seductive towards him; as he weakens, he'll probably succumb.

Attack! The men may decide to attack the women and steal their gold, or even the women themselves. The women won't interfere with the theft. These items are sacred to Hecate, and she'll see that they are returned (as well as cursing the men). The women will fight back if attacked. They have exceptional attributes and should be able to drive the heroes off. Hecate will intervene to protect her priestesses, with fogs or strange shadows or illusions to confuse the men. Any gold taken from the island will return to the island if sold. If the men keep it, they continue to weaken, and a compulsion grows in them to return to the island, as if they'd been forced to leave.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Evil Movie Trailers

There's a special place in hell for Evil Movie Trailers.

Sure, Dante may have forgotten to mention it in his masterpiece "Disco Inferno," but these wicked teasers are down there, facing their ultimate punishment. Perhaps the concept of Conservation of Torment applies, and they're being watched over and over by Evil Movie Critics. It really doesn't matter.

This week I'm going to focus on one genre of Evil Movie Trailer: the Three-Minute Movie. And, again, I promise I'm going to tie it into gaming somehow.

The Three-Minute Movie EMT is wicked because it is, perhaps, a too literal interpretation of what's going to happen in the movie. Many an unsuspecting movie-goer has been lured into a movie upon watching the trailer, only to learn that the movie is little more than a two-hour version of that trailer. Every exciting moment, every one-liner, every twist. . . it's all in the trailer. Sure, the movie's scenes may not be in the exact same order as the trailer's, but then it becomes a mental game of sorting: When will the protagonist end up in an exploding tank? When will the gunman in the crowd try to shoot the president? And so on.

Three-minute movies. . . what more do these full-sized versions bring to the table that their trailer didn't?

- *Independence Day*. On July 3rd there's an alien invasion. They kick our butts and blow up the White House. On July 4th we triumph.
- *Wild Wild West*. Two incompatible lawkeepers are forced to team up by President Grant against a madman to discover what his sinister plan is. It turns out his sinister plan involves a giant mechanical spider that threatens to destroy everything.
- *Bone Collector*. A paralyzed cop recruits an officer to help track down a psycho before he kills again. The killer eludes them, but he keeps leaving tantalizing clues for them to figure out. They figure out the clues.

Con Air. *Pushing Tin*. *Titanic*. All of these movies, regardless of their own merits (or lack thereof), were lessened for me by having seen the trailer. Moments that were supposed to be surprising weren't; complications that were supposed to be a shock were expected.

So, what (I hear you ask) does this have to do with gaming?

Well, I think back to what I consider to be my least satisfying adventures as both a player and a GM, and many of them are three-minute movies. In other words, the premise or plot hook, as presented, is exactly what the adventure turns out to be.

- "This fort is being occupied by vicious ogres," says the king. "We need to stop them and destroy the fort before they raid our borders again!"
- "It's vital you get this antidote to the Prime Minister in twelve hours," says the mission director, "or she'll die. And watch out for a terrorist organization that's rumored to be looking for this serum."
- "The Shapechanging People could be anywhere," says the princess, "so I'm going to remain alone only with my trusted bodyguard Knifey until we get to my crucial-for-galactic-peace wedding."

Now, if these three adventure hooks turn out to be as straightforward as their premises indicate, then (again, in my opinion) they're not plot hooks; they're three-minute adventures. As a player I have no choice but to sit back and wait for events to happen that I *know* will happen. We'll need to invade the fort and kill the ogres while the terrorist organization tries to steal our serum, only to discover that the princess has acquired a severe case of knife wounds while her bodyguard is nowhere to be found. Blow up fort. Save PM Find bodyguard. Roll credits.

When I see trailers I like, I realize they do what I believe a trailer *should* do: pique my interest in the movie, give me an idea what it's going to be about, but don't reveal too much about the movie itself. In recent memory, the trailers for

American Beauty, *Fight Club*, and *Star Wars: Episode I* did this well. They introduce the interesting characters, give hints to the plot and premise, while not stealing the movies' thunder.

Now, the interesting question is: Who is to blame for Evil Movie Trailers? Is it the trailer's fault for revealing too much, or the movie's fault for not having more substance? It's a question I'll leave to scholars (you know, the hooded monks who, in 2525 [if man is still alive], will be analyzing my work and wondering what these Shapechanging People were). Regardless, as GMs we can approach the lesson of Three-Minute Movie EMTs from either side; we can either ensure that the premise doesn't reveal too much, *or* we can make sure our stories are intricate enough that we can reveal a logical amount of the premise while still ensuring there will be surprises.

Maybe the ogres are being controlled by an outside force. Maybe the terrorist organization tries to convince the protagonists that the serum they have is laced with a deadly contagious virus; could they be telling the truth? Mayhaps the GM should neglect to tell the PCs that the Shapechanging People are out to thwart the wedding.

Heed the warning of the EMTs and try to figure out what your story hooks are; if the adventure is just an expanded form of the story hook, then you may want to reveal less hook or tell more story.

Or just give up and go watch a movie instead.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Champions 4th Edition***, p. 50.

(Four stars) "You must make haste for you sense it is not safe to linger by the smoking remains of the ruined monastery. The black-winged beasts could return at any moment."

The Invisible Hand of Vecna

Release Strategies for *Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition*

This month marks the beginning of the summer convention season, and therefore the season of new releases. The biggest product launch on the horizon is the new edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, scheduled to debut this August at the Gen Con Game Fair. Other writers will pass judgment on the success of the redesign of the rules and the setting (which I will only briefly touch on below), but the business behind such a huge project is interesting in and of itself. The brand team at Wizards of the Coast, under the direction of industry wunderkind Ryan Dancey, have designed the strategy underlying the re-launch of *D&D* which, successful or not, will reverberate throughout the industry for years. The information leaking out of their Renton offices suggests that there are two interrelated strands to their strategy: leveraging the *D&D* brand for market penetration, and Open Source Gaming. Let's look at each in turn during this month's column.

The re-launch of *D&D* has been on the minds of gamers since it was first announced at Gen Con last year. Signs hawking the "Big Announcement" filled the halls of the Midwest Express Center. Hundreds of people watched as WotC front-man Peter Adkison confirmed plans to update the most well-known RPG in the world. Those same hundreds applauded wildly as Ryan Dancey displayed the contract that marked the return of *D&D* co-creator Gary Gygax to the world of *Greyhawk*. The buzz was on, and WotC has acted deliberately all year to build interest in the new releases. In addition, whether by design or happy accident, the classic *D&D* cartoon has returned to Saturday mornings, and Gary Gygax voiced himself as a character on the TV show *Futurama*, playing *D&D* with the likes of Vice-President Al Gore and noted Physicist Steven Hawking. And let's not forget the *D&D* movie starring *American Beauty*'s Thora Birch and Jeremy Irons, scheduled for release later in the year.

Nevertheless, the buzz only creates interest -- what about the product? The first amazing thing about *3rd Edition* is the return to prominence of the simple *D&D* name. Due to several legal and business issues at the old TSR, the *Dungeons & Dragons* name fell away and *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* became the standard. Many thought that the "Advanced" in the name made the game confusing to potential new players, since it was not clear that there was no corresponding "Basic" material. When WotC bought TSR, one of the first changes made to the line was the recovery of the name. Only time will tell if this simple change will be as important as it seemed to the *D&D* team.

I am sure that the advertising for last year's announcement, ubiquitous as it was at the con, will pale in comparison to that for this year's release of the *Player's Handbook*. Everyone entering the exhibit hall will have to make a saving throw vs. advertising to avoid buying the book immediately. Many will be unable to resist, and the lines to buy the new book will surely be longer and more electrified even than those for the release of White Wolf's *Werewolf: The Apocalypse*. The *PHB* itself is supposed to be fantastic. The stats are quite surprising: Hardcover, full color throughout, and priced at only $19.95! This shockingly low price is possible due to two things: sales volume and the concept of the "loss leader."

WotC expects to sell more than 10,000 copies of the *PHB* at Gen Con alone, with thousands more sold during the Christmas season. This kind of demand will permit printing quotes, even taking into account the excellent production, far lower than a company with more moderate sales could ever hope to receive. WotC hopes that the low price, especially in comparison to other beginning RPGs (*D&D*'s nearest competitors will cost 150% or more of the price of the *Player's Handbook*), will mean that everyone -- *D&D* veterans, devotees of other systems, and new players alike -- will pick up and play *Dungeons & Dragons*. Of course, they're giving up the extra profit they could surely receive by charging the market price for the core products, but WotC hopes that follow-on sales will be larger due to the market penetration of the core books, making the short-term financial loss less serious. The classic example of this strategy is the "razors and blades" analogy, in which it makes sense for a company to give away razors free, relying on constant sales of blades for profit. Only time will tell if their strategy is correct, but it has worked repeatedly in other contexts. There is no reason to suspect that it will not be successful here as well.

The other two core products, the *Dungeon Master Guide* and the *Monster Manual*, will debut at one-month intervals.

(Yes, *Monster Manual*. Part of the legal maneuvering described above also necessitated the change to "*Monstrous Manual*." Now that it's over, this book can have its old name back as well.) They will have similar statistics, including the low price.

Nevertheless, this is only their launch strategy. Of course, they will also continue to support the game with a line of adventures and other sourcebooks that will keep players on the edge of their seats. The most interesting part of their line extension strategy is the concept of Open Source Gaming. This revolutionary new way to conceive of game design and system licensing has already gotten people talking.

Essentially, the idea of Open Source Gaming is simple. WotC will make the basic elements of the *D&D* system (renamed the D20 system, after the prominence of the D20 in the streamlined dice mechanic) available to other designers, with the understanding that those designers will, in return, make their rule extensions available to other designers. This is a licensing system similar to the "open source" of the Linux computer operating system. Indeed, Linux creator Linus Torvald has shown some interest in the D20 project and has given advice and encouragement to *D&D* brand manager (and Open Gaming Foundation founder) Ryan Dancey.

There are two reasons for the prevalence of unique game systems being tied to their worlds. Firstly, designers are creative and feel that their system is either better than all previous systems, or at least better suited to the game's particular world. The second reason is that once players have learned a game system, they are more likely to keep playing that game, rather than change games and learn a new system. After all, if players have invested time and money in a particular system, they are far less likely to chuck it just because DinkyCo's new game becomes flavor of the month. But what if your game system is so huge that you don't fear that? What if your game system is *D&D*. Well then it makes sense for you to open up your mechanics to other designers. The more people who learn the D20 system, the more people will be supporting WotC's core RPG product. You see, the license is written in such a way that players, even if they are playing a game produced under the D20 name, written and published by someone other that WotC, will still need a copy of the basic D20 rulebook, which for the foreseeable future is the *Player's Handbook* for *Dungeons & Dragons*.

The hope is that the next generation of designers will come and play in WotC's sandbox, extending the popularity of D20 by passing up the system design phase of new games in favor of spending time on the worlds. Adventure and sourcebook design is expected to be so easy that some small publishers have been considering the possibility of releasing new material under the D20 license at Gen Con, right alongside the release of the *PHB*, which they themselves won't see until the public release on Thursday morning. Most of the world creation would be done before the show with mechanics and stat blocks inserted in the appropriate places, and then rushed off to instant printers for a quick return to the booth. It's not clear that anyone will be able to pull a stunt like that off, but if it happens, it will be a new day in RPG design for sure.

Of course, none of these products will be official *D&D* releases. The initial license is only for the underlying system -- combat, task resolution, character creation, etc. Later add-ons to the licensing program may make it possible for outside designers to extend the world of *Dungeons & Dragons*, but not at first. Still, opening the system to outside people and even entertaining the possibility of licensed *D&D* products is a huge step away from the policies which governed TSR in the past.

Wizards of the Coast's *D&D* brand team (Dancey, along with lead designers Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet, and Skip Williams), with the support of their corporate parent Hasbro, has developed an aggressive and innovative campaign surrounding the release of *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition*. If they're successful, it could result in a huge influx of new players into a hobby we all know and love. Clearly, this is not your older brother's *D&D*.

American Shangri-La: Mount Shasta

"The Indians say the Great Spirit made the mountain first of all."
-- Joaquin Miller, on Mount Shasta

And he did a really good job, too. Towering 14,162 feet above sea level, its coat of brilliant white glaciers gleaming in the clear Cascade Mountain air, unspoiled forests stretching away at its feet, Mount Shasta is some of the Great Spirit's best work, no doubt about it. Nestled at the junction of the Sierra Nevada and Cascade chains about fifty miles south of the Oregon border, Mount Shasta still remains fairly remote from urban civilization. However, it's apparently convenient to the astral plane; it's the home of any number of elevated spiritual entities, Lemurian colonies, gentle Bigfeet, and Ascended Masters. If there's an American branch office of Shangri-La, Mount Shasta is definitely it.

Even the name says it: "Shasta" has been variously derived from the French "chaste" and the Russian "tshastal," both meaning "pure." Its Indian name, to the local Wintun (who got named the Shasta Indians, after the mountain), was Wyreka, the "mountain to the north." That obviously can't have been its right name, since unlike "Shasta," it doesn't add kabbalistically to 370, the same as "shalom." A veritable mountain of purity and peace, then; it hasn't even erupted since 1786, as far as anyone can tell. As volcanoes go, it pretty much doesn't.

"Everyone knows about the Lemurians around here, son. Why, Mount Shasta is their secret home, or something like that."
-- California Highway Patrolman to David Hatcher Childress, Apr 29, 1992

Which must be why the Lemurians built their secret retreat there, after the sinking of Lemuria, or rather, after the sinking of Mu in the nearby Pacific. (A fellow named Morris Doreal claims that Mount Shasta was built by the Atlanteans, not the Lemurians. It is to laugh.) The survivors of sinking Lemuria/Mu (known specifically as the Yaktavians) retreated to the large Lemurian colony in northern California (at that time an island cut off from the American mainland by an immense imaginary sea that John Dee insisted on putting in his maps) and, realizing that any number of post-sinking hard rains were gonna fall, carved out a city (or two; some sources give Yaktavia and Ilethelme as the Twin Cities of the "Secret Commonwealth" of Shasta) in the bowels of the volcano. The Yaktavians used their incomparable bell-making technology to do so, constructing bells "made of a transparent substance that reflects no light" and using their arcane tunings and frequencies to carve Mount Shasta's interior into enormous chambers and airship havens, all powered by a crystal the size of the Empire State Building. Some Yaktavian bells can create light, or (one imagines) any other kind of radiation whether occult, etheric, or electromagnetic. A Yaktavian bell would make a swell McGuffin for any kind of occult or secret tech game, and the Yaktavians might even be the source of the Crystal Bell in *GURPS Warehouse 23.* Yaktavian sonic engineers would also make fine PCs in the [ancient astronaut freestyle campaign frame](#) I mentioned some time back.

"[T]he walls, polished as by jewelers, though excavated as by giants; floors carpeted with long, fleecy fabric that looked like fur, but was a mineral product; ledges intersected by the builders, and in their wonderful polish exhibited veinings of gold, of silver, of green copper ores, and maculations of precious stones. Verily, a mystic temple . . ."
-- Frederick Spencer Oliver, *A Dweller on Two Planets* (1894)

Back to kabbalah, briefly, for another look inside Mount Shasta, at its numerical core. When we add up the digits of its height in feet, we get 1+4+1+6+2 = 14, or "zahab," meaning "gold." And there's gold in that thar hill, if visionary Theosophists without a shred of proof are to be believed, and why the heck not? Shangri-La is built on trust. And, apparently, on gold. Frederick Spencer Oliver channeled a vision in 1884 from "Phylos of Thibet," regarding Phylos' past life as a forty-niner named Pierson, initiated into the secrets of Mount Shasta by a Chinese laborer named Quong. Quong led Pierson into Mount Shasta to discover a secret golden city of Initiates. In 1894, Oliver published his vision, and set off the modern era of Theosophical vision-questing around Mount Shasta. An occult-minded astronomer of sorts named Edgar Lucien Larkin claimed to have seen the Lemurian cities' "golden dome" through its vibratory barrier on the slopes of Mount Shasta through his telescope on Mount Lowe -- quite a feat, given that Mount Lowe is in Los Angeles County hundreds of miles away.

One Abraham Mansfield, lost on the mountainside in 1931, met a seven-foot tall Lemurian, who took him into the mountain and showed him not only the standard golden city, but also giant chairs of gold and the golden Plates of Time, which he never quite described (except to say they were full of "Etrucian" wisdom -- possibly the Etruscans, over in America through the [tunnel network](#) from Mount Vesuvius to Mount Shasta) but which would be great things to use to create Occultist Alternate Histories. One J.C. Brown claimed to have found, in 1904, a cave entrance to chambers full of ten-foot tall mummies, golden tablets, golden shields, and other mystical impedimentia. Rather than let his employers, the British Lord Cowdray Mining Company, have it, he concealed the find and traveled the world for thirty years researching Lemurian wisdom. Finally, in 1934, with Lord Cowdray safely dead seven years, Brown recruited 80 men in Stockton to help him properly excavate the cave. After six weeks of planning, though, Brown dropped out of sight, vanishing forever on the day the expedition was supposed to leave.

"Those who have come to stores in nearby cities . . . have spoken English in a perfect manner with perhaps a tinge of the British accent, and have been reluctant to answer questions or give any information about themselves. The goods they have purchased have always been paid for in gold nuggets of far greater value than the article purchased . . ."
-- H. Spencer Lewis, *Lemuria: Lost Continent of the Pacific*

Brown's disappearance adds something of a sinister tinge to the reports that the white-robed strangers (tall, with unusually shaped skulls) often seen around Mount Shasta spoke with British accents. Lord Cowdray, by the way, owned virtually all the oil in Mexico, and was one of Britain's richest men during that time; a prime candidate for Conspiratorial Anti-Lemurian British Round Table Skullduggery.

Speaking of sinister tinges, of course, there's the I AM cult started by itinerant salesman Guy Ballard after having a vision of a very Nordic looking Ascended Master Count [Saint-Germain](#) on the slopes of Mount Shasta on August 16, 1930. Ballard's I AM movement concentrated on using "psychic cleansing" to destroy unhealthy spiritual influences like Communism, labor unions, and foreigners (eradicating hundreds of thousands of spirits in a rally in Philadelphia), all in the name of the Great White Brotherhood. ("Tshastal" also means "white." Hmmm.) I AM had 400,000 members closely associated with American fascist William Dudley Pelley's theosophical Silver Shirt movement (Pelley and Ballard met on Mount Shasta) when Ballard spoiled it all by dying suddenly (and not Ascending) on December 29, 1939. In 1940 the Federal government launched loyalty investigations into I AM and the Silver Shirts, crippling the movements in the name of the war effort. Interestingly, the Rosicrucian Shasta Lemurians come from "Telos," (another name for Yaktavia), and the I AM Ascended Masters come from Venus. The weaselly Nordic-Nazi aliens have called themselves both "Telosians" and "Venusians." Could the Nordic-looking "Lemurians" have been Evil Luciferian Racists all along? Of course not. I don't believe your negativity. Next you'll be saying that the aliens aren't our friends.

"[T]his led to the 1954 . . . landings and treaty negotiations -- under the Eisenhower administration -- with the space-based Greys and Reptiloids, even though previous treaties . . . were signed with the humanoid [Telos/Ashtar/Agharti/Melchizedek] groups under Mt. Shasta, California . . . According to former Dulce base security officer Thomas Castello, the Shasta treaty dates back to the Grover Cleveland presidency."
-- "Branton," *The Omega File*

When in fact, the majority of the evidence points the other way; even such an eagle-eyed observer as "Commander X" avers that Mount Shasta's secret UFO base is in the hands of the "good guys." The alien good guys, of course: they've been our friends ever since they signed a treaty with President Cleveland back in 1886. (They probably had a treaty before that with [Emperor Norton](#), while they were secretly infiltrating Gold Rush era San Francisco, no doubt through its Chinatown.) The 19th-century Yaktavians would make ultimately swell ***GURPS Old West*** Patrons. Possibly their time-vibratory bells sent various bones, artifacts, and machined parts back to 55 million years ago to be discovered in the gold tailings in Mount Temple between 1853 and 1870, as indeed they were.

Their "vailxi" craft (combo air and space ships) resemble the [Great Airship of 1897](#) (seen over Stockton in November of 1896) not a little, as do the UFOs seen by David Williamson on October 12, 1956 and by Jack Brown (no relation to the missing J.C. Brown?) on November 29, 1966 -- over Mount Shasta. (On the other hand, the local Indians used to say the lights over Mount Shasta came from the planet Venus.) The [modern UFO era began](#) just on the other side of the Cascades, over Yakima, Washington. Mount Shasta's not short of other [ultraterrestrials](#), either; the Yaktavians are described in some sources as "elfin," picknickers have seen "dwarves" on the mountain, and the local Bigfoot (or the

Wintun monster, the Shupcher) would both fit the "giant" description. The Mount Shasta base can be a **GURPS Cliffhangers** Lost City, a **GURPS Atomic Horror** Loi outpost, or a dimensional gate (activated by vibratory bell or flute energy) to the Hollow Earth or other times (through, no doubt, the Plates of Time). If you join Mount Shasta to the other "sacred mountains" throughout the world -- Olympus, Moriah, Meru, Taishan, and so forth -- you aren't even restricted to the Pacific Northwest. Because no matter where you go, you're always just one ring away from the invisible empire of the Great White Lemurian Brotherhood. That doesn't comfort you? Maybe you need to spend a little more time on Mount Shasta.

Pyramid Review

The Apocalypse Stone

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Jason Carl & Chris Pramas

96 pages, $16.95

"Don't destroy the earth in your first book. You might need it later."
--Douglas Adams

The *Apocalypse Stone* is an *Advanced Dungeons & Dragons* adventure designed for powerful characters (4-6 characters levels 15 and above are recommended). Adapting this adventure for lower levels is theoretically possible but would not be easy. More importantly, reduced power wouldn't fit with the epic scope of the story line. Adapting it to higher levels probably won't be necessary.

This adventure could probably work as a stand-alone adventure, provided the players were given suitably powerful characters, but would work best as part of a seriously long-running (years at least) campaign. In fact, as written, *The Apocalypse Stone* is intended to be the final adventure of such a campaign -— and the game world is not likely to survive the experience!

I will remain intentionally vague about the details of the bigger picture of this adventure as the potential enjoyment of this adventure depends heavily upon the DM keeping his/her players in the dark as to what's really going on. If you run this one correctly your players won't be disappointed. They may very well end up seriously ticked off, but not disappointed.

TAS begins with a very well conceived introduction and setup, despite the fact that the writers do use the deplorable phrase "You're all sitting in a tavern" as one of its alternative beginnings. From there the Hack-factor skyrockets. The first leg of the actual adventure is little more than a thinly disguised (and high-powered) dungeon crawl as the characters wade their way through a truly mind-numbing assortment of monsters that includes beholders, gorgons, giant trolls, a greater medusa and no less than three dragons. Eventually, of course, the heroes defeat the Mastermind, retrieve the artifact and reap the divine glory. But after this is over, things finally start to get interesting.

The next section is much more general, providing a number of short encounters and adventure seeds to wile away the time as the heroes' lives return to their peculiar semblance of normal. As events progress, however, it becomes increasingly clear that things are not as they should be. Certain types of magic begin to go awry, clerics and paladins lose contact with (and powers from) their deities and the local versions of the Horsemen of the Apocalypse from Revelation begin their joy rides.

All of this is, of course, the fault of the unwitting PCs. How they discover this fact is truly inspired. I won't blow the whole surprise but lets just say a very put-out archdevil-in-exile gives them his undivided attention in gruesome and imaginative ways.

Once the PCs know that they are getting the blame for the Really Bad Things happening in the world, they must set their sights on fixing them. This leads them into a series of "tests of character," divine tasks they must perform and temptations they must overcome. This section is truly the jewel in the crown of this module. The heroes will have to rise above their baser (and possibly more familiar) natures in order to pass the tests and proceed. If they fail to do so, then literally all will be lost. This provides some beautiful role-playing moments that stand in sharp contrast to the hack-fest that opened the adventure. It should also prove telling about the personalities of your players.

Once these obstacles are overcome (assuming that they are—my experience with players suggests that only a rare few will pass the tests) the Final Battle may be joined. But even if the heroes prevail, it is entirely up to the DM whether or not the planet survives the experience!

Beyond the adventure itself *TAS* is a source of some useful information. The chapter on developing an apocalyptic adventure and/or campaign was pretty good if a bit limited. For DMs unprepared or unwilling to snuff their (or somebody else's) planet, there are also several suggested alternatives, from moving the campaign to another world to drastically altering this one (a la the *Cataclysm of Dragonlance*) to just letting the heroes save the day and move on. Curiously, *TAS* fails to address what is, to me, an obvious and powerful way to end the campaign without incinerating the planet: let the heroes save the day by sacrificing their own lives to do it.

The best sourcebook material, however, is less than three pages long. An appendix provides information on expanding the Death Knight, one of *AD&D*'s more intriguing beasties, to include not only warrior versions but wizard, rogue and priest ones as well. The resulting Death Warlock, Death Stalker and Death Adept (respectively) will likely become staples of many a wicked DM.

The Apocalypse Stone is, as a whole, an ambitious and satisfying product. It is a curious balance of WWF-level gratuitous violence and truly inspired alternatives to and controls of the same. I would personally revamp Chapter Two entirely but Chapters Three and Four are worth the product. While plagued with a number of editorial mistakes -— some of them quite glaring —- as well as the standard TSR lack of an index, the book is organized in such a way that it flows with little difficulty or necessary cross-referencing.

But what truly makes this adventure something special is the audacity to suggest blowing the entire world away. If you are not prepared to give up your game world (or at least your current campaign) then *The Apocalypse Stone* is little more than just another high-level monster bash. Go the distance and you will have in your hands an adventure your players will never forget —- nor possibly forgive either.

--Robert Neal Byles

Digging Yourself Out of a Corner!

by Peter V. Dell'Orto

It has happened. Your PCs are unconscious, dead, or incapacitated by forces beyond their powers. Their plan, good or ill-conceived, failed completely, and their enemy reigns triumphant. How can you save them, and save all the hard work you and your players have done on your campaign? How can you spare them without being obvious about it? Luckily, fiction is rife with examples of ways to do it. History even gives a couple of examples if you know where to look. The purpose of this article is to give you ideas you can use to spare your PCs, as well as how to pull it off without looking desperate or unprepared. Nothing kills the mood quite like an obvious plot fudge. Fudging die rolls to spare PCs or kill NPCs is not addressed -- we are concerned here with Plot Fiat, not Dice Fudges.

There are some obvious ways to deal with a helpless, knocked out group of PCs who are obviously Doomed. Kill them. Sell them into slavery. Ransom them back to their families. But these possibilities are often real downers for players -- "Sorry, the bad guy won and you are now digging in the mines. Your sick grandmother dies while you are away and the bad guys won the war." While slavery, ransom, or turning the PCs into ghosts can be a great change for a campaign, a GM should have other ways handy to spare the PCs and keep the game running.

There are four essential rules to GM Fiat:

- **Rule #1:** Don't do it more than you have to. Unless the genre demands it (such as swashbuckling), or some in game reason (*GURPS*'s Serendipity advantage, or *Champions*'s Luck) gives the PCs a right to expect more. Even here you want to let the PCs action decide their fate more than your intercession. If you overdo it, the game becomes a series of coincidences designed to reward poor play. Done in moderation at best, it can keep a campaign on track and deserving PCs alive.
- **Rule #2:** Make it the result of their actions, if possible. This means that if reinforcements come, it is because the PCs helped them, or gave them a heads-up, or left their GPS signaling on the emergency line. While random artillery fire or a falling piano is hard to explain as the result of PC action, give it a try. Maybe the piano's tether was weakened by a ricochet earlier in the fight. . .
- **Rule #3:** If you are stuck for ideas, listen to the players. Off-hand remarks by the players are often a great source of inspiration. "I wonder if the cops outside heard the bad guy's gunfire" can trigger an onrush of reinforcements you may have forgotten about in the heat of play. Every "wouldn't it be cool if" or "wouldn't it be funny if" is a hidden request for the GM to try something. Do not get out of hand, though, and take every suggestion that comes along -- remember Rule #1.
- **Rule #4:** Make it seamless. The more likely, the more believable. The players (not the PCs) must accept the fiat was not only possible, but likely. Having an unconscious PC warrior roll into a ditch and be overlooked is more likely to be accepted than having his foes struck down by lightning. Subtle and smooth is better than loud and obvious. If the PCs also have to pay for their failure in the

first place, make it in proportion to the errors they made (a lot if they had a
poor plan and bad execution, very little if a few failed rolls decided it).

There are a few basic types of fiat you can use; there are many, many subtypes and often categories cross. However, you can break down Plot Fiat into a few categories. Clever GMs may come up many more variants than I have suggested -- more power to them! This list is a good starting point, not an ultimate list.

Random Environmental Deus Ex Machina

PCs are well known for getting captured and condemned to death. The world holds it breath as they watch the PCs about to die? Not a chance! You can use all sorts of environmental factors to save the PCs. Nooses can snap, the scaffolding can fall, the power can go out, they can be fed an underdose of the killing poison.

Pay close attention to the environment the PCs are in when they are in trouble -- is there a storm that will force the guards inside leaving the PCs alone? A battlefield from which a random cannon shot or stray chunk of rubble that can destroy the stockade they are imprisoned in? Perhaps an out of control hovercar nearly runs down the villain's flunkies, leaving enough time for the helpless PCs to escape. *GURPS High Tech* specifically mentions the Mill's Bomb as a piece of Deus Ex Machina -- shrapnel from hundreds of yards away striking down an NPC with the drop on the PCs.

For example, the PCs are assaulting a fortress, but get knocked out in the fighting-almost certain doom. Instead, while they were out cold, troops on their side stormed that section of the fort and held it long enough to medivac the team. If the PCs lost through their own stupidity, they may get punishment duty or a bad reputation to make up for the failure without killing them ("You let Professor Obidiah Nosferatu escape! I hope you like KP, Sergeant!") If they lost due to bad luck, the PCs could have held it just long enough to dislodge the enemy, or be rewarded for their heroism ("Having held the enemy in check long enough for us to rescue our wounded, we present you with the Medal for Superfluous Bravery.").

They Just Let Us Go!

NPCs should have plenty of reasons not to kill defeated PCs. Most PCs are exceptional individuals with powers beyond those of normal people -- and certainly beyond those of your average bad guy. Any villain worth his or her salt could use the PCs -- willingly or unwillingly, witting or preferably unwitting. Extracting an oath from a PC for a service in return for their lives is good; tricking them into doing so is better. A villain could allow the PCs to escape easily so she can send her least loyal or most dangerous followers after them to cull the herd, or an ambitious lieutenant can let them go, making sure they get a shot at the current leader on the way out. Looting the PCs and turning them loose is another option for megalomaniacal villains ("Now that I have the Orange Octagon of Octavu you are no danger to me. Bind their wounds and release them.").

A popular variant is "No One Could Survive That!", where unconscious PCs are either mistaken for dead, or their bodies are overlooked. An unconscious warrior could have rolled into a ditch, or under a desk, after being knocked senseless and not noticed by his foes, allowing a later rescue of other, captured, PCs. A further variant is to let the PCs go in an incredibly dangerous area -- turn them out into the wilderness where they will "surely" die. If the PCs happen to find the secret way into the villain's lair, and a hidden cache of weapons, more the better for the game. . .

Selling the PCs into slavery falls under this category as well, especially if they have the opportunity to escape. As I mentioned before, this can really rankle some players -- coffle scars, whip marks, and confiscated gear fall under "fates worse than death" for some.

Hey! The Prisoners Are Helpless! Give Them Some Weapons!

Another standard is the "sporting chance" -- demand a duel with a PC fencer, or a bare-handed match with a PC martial artist. Hunting down the PCs on horseback, or on vehicles of some sort is popular -- and especially useful since the "head start" gives the PCs plenty of time to improvise weapons and reverse positions with their foes. PCs defeated by flunkies or trapped by the enemy can be rescued by the Archvillian and forced to fight one another -- shades of *Star Trek* or *Enter the Dragon*. Wanting to fight the PCs man-to-man, or have them fight in an arena of some sort, is also an excellent reason to nurse the PCs back to health. Nursing them back to health, of course, means that they will be able to make a reasonable attempt to escape. So much the better sport. . .

Variants include letting the cannon fodder hunt them down, make them fight with archaic weapons (popular in sci-fi), or make a spectacle of them in front of the men ("Now you see how the master fights!").

Uncle Larry? Is That You?

PCs, at least in theory, have families. Some of those relatives are bound to end up as Storm Troopers, Generic Guards, Priests of the Great Good God, or just merchants who run the only All Night Ammo store in town. This fiat has its down points, though -- you are stuck with a new NPC in an unlikely situation, and it is hard to pull off without showing your hand.

A more useful variant of the Relative is the Desperate Enemy -- an ambitious lieutenant sees the PCs are potential tools, and either openly or covertly uses them to kill his boss. A quiet, unobtrusive servant may have been biding his time to get his revenge and free the PCs to help. An enemy with a conscience can let them go ("I worship Oo-ga too. Just don't hurt anyone as you leave."),

An extreme variant of this (which overlaps with #1, above) is Thanks for Stopping By, Patron Deity! PCs crying for help from a deity can be rewarded with a visit or intervention. Unless you are playing a game where the divine regularly show up (*Call of Cthulhu* or *Elric* to mind), this should be handled with extreme care.

Ye Olde Deathtrap and Speech Gag

A cliché in Cliffhanger and Super Hero games is the "Speech and Death Trap" routine. Any captured PCs will be given a long speech by the villains of the piece, and left to die unattended in a trap of some kind. If the conventions are changed slightly, the players might not even recognize the cliché. The trap is not necessarily a constructed death trap -- a pit full of rats or a flooding sewer is more than sufficient. Even the trap is optional. A sufficiently long speech can allow knocked out PCs to regain consciousness, spells to run out, and ropes to be sawn through or untied.

Useful variants include sacrificing them after an extremely long ceremony to He Of The Too Many Tentacles instead of a speech, or releasing the PCs in a dangerous, non-trap situation. PCs released in a deadly jungle or in the Arctic are in just as much trouble as PCs placed in a comic-book style death trap.

GM Fiat can be an excellent way to keep your hard work and that of your players from being washed away by a flurry of poor rolling and a stumped GM. Keeping the four rules in mind and using the suggestions above, you should be able to keep your plots on track and your PCs alive. Despite, or if possible, because of their actions.

by Loki Carbis

Art by Heather Hudson

Players, being the pesky critters that we all know and love -- and let's face it, that we can't really do without -- are always looking for an edge. . . A way to be one up on you, the poor, over-worked GM. And players are not above reading the rules, even when they know you don't want them to. Perhaps even *especially* then. **Feng Shui** players are no different in this regard from players of any other system.

This article suggests one way for a canny **Feng Shui** GM to stay several steps ahead of his players on this matter. **Feng Shui** players, particularly those who have already played the game, are no doubt familiar with the game's unusual cosmology, and the all-pervasive Time War that rages between the four main Junctures. One easy way to liven up a new **Feng Shui** campaign for experienced (or even jaded) players is to start them off in a Juncture other than the contemporary one. But why stop there? The players all know that it's the same Juncture -- but if you make whichever of the other three Junctures you're using the contemporary one, and adjust the positions of the other Junctures accordingly, you can really knock your players for a loop. This is true especially if you start them off slowly, with a few adventures in the home Juncture before they get to the Netherworld and discover what you've done.

The four basic Junctures of the **Feng Shui** background are located in 1996 (the contemporary Juncture), 69 AD, 1850 and 2056. Each of these is described to some extent in the **Feng Shui** rules, as well as in the supplements describing the dominant groups in each era: **Thorns of the Lotus** for the 69AD Juncture, **Blood of the Valiant** for the 1850 Juncture and **Seeds of the New Flesh** for the 2056 Juncture. Considering each of those other three as the contemporary Juncture, the others move:

- For the 69 AD Juncture, the new points in time accessible are at 1859 BC, 77 BC and 129 AD.
- For the 1850 Juncture, the same points are at 77 BC, 1744 AD, and 1910 AD.
- Finally, for the 2056 Juncture, the relevant dates are 129 AD, 1910 AD and 2116 AD.

This gives a total of six new Juncture locations -- 1858 BC, 77 BC, 129 AD, 1744 AD, 1910 AD and 2116 AD. As described in Chapter 16 of the **Feng Shui** rules, the dominant group in each of these Junctures partially determines where the majority of the world's Chi sites can be found, and how the flow of Chi affects the world. The mechanics of this are described at

greater length in the tables at the conclusion of this article.
Some of these Junctures are home to groups not described in
the *Feng Shui* rules, mostly due to the fact that many of them no longer exist. (Or, in the case of the 2116 Juncture, they do not yet exist). Briefly, these groups are:

- **The Rising Sons**, a break-away faction of the Jade Wheel Society that wishes to see the Japanese develop political power and Arcanowave technology in the first half of the 20th century. They are the impetus behind Japan's rapid modernization and expansionism during the first half of the twentieth century, which is the way they seek to gain control over many of the key Feng Shui sites in the Far East.
- **The Servants of the God-King**, a priestly caste of Ancient Egypt that maintained the power of Egypt through their figurehead Pharaohs for over three millennia with their understanding of the Chi flows of the river Nile. Unfortunately for them, they are largely incapable of expanding these teachings to work in other lands outside Egypt. Alexander the Great was guided by their teachings, which his advisors were able to expand upon to some extent. But his death prevented him from completing his Chi-based conquests.
- **The Navigators** are a sort of Renaissance era Dragons. This group is inspired by the works of Marco Polo and other such travelogue writers. They are a predominately European group (although they do have numerous members from nations all along the great Silk Routes) that have a limited understanding of Chi, and who seek to make that knowledge available to others. Unfortunately for them, the writers they follow are often charlatans, or misled by the Ascended -- while there are places like El Dorado and the Kingdom of Prester John, these fabled lands exist only in the Netherworld. The chroniclers of these lands might believe them to exist in the real world, but they demonstrably do not, and thus, the uninitiated world dismisses their works as pure fantasy. Where the truth cannot be suppressed or distorted, the Ascended (through the Order of the Wheel), control many publishers, which makes such writers easily found and silenced.
- **The Martyrs** for Potemkin are a loose group composed entirely of Abominations. They worship the memory of Battlechimp Potemkin, but they have perverted his teachings. While Potemkin sought only to destroy all technology, the Martyrs believe that he intended for all humanity to be destroyed, and for the Abominations to inherit the Earth. Although they have limited Chi power, many of them are innately able to enter the Netherworld, and they are a serious danger to all times and places.

1858 BC

At this stage of world history, the systematic study of Chi sites is very poorly advanced. Chi sites are scattered more or less equally around the world, with a slightly greater than normal concentration of them in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean. The Servants of the God-King -- the priests who control the Pharaohs of Egypt from behind the scenes -- maintain their centuries old power through an understanding of Chi. Some philosophers and priests in the eternally squabbling Greek city states also understand it, although the Greek obsession with relics of sorcerous power has led them down a path of easy but limited power, and less understanding. In the Far East, the original sorcerers who will form the nucleus of the Eaters of the Lotus are yet unborn, and their predecessors waste their power in pointless squabbling. No one faction dominates, largely due to the fact that the few factions which do exist are too small and too scattered to amass much power. In fact, the majority of the world's Chi sites are controlled by groups -- or more commonly, individuals -- who have but a single such site to their names.

The sole exception to this is the kingdom ruled by the Hsia dynasty in what will one day be China. Under the cunning leadership of Shao K'ang, many Innerwalkers have been organized into an elite force, a combination of espionage, commando and geomantic functions. Although they do not seek to expand Shao's territories, they guard those which he does rule with great fervor, and work to keep the surrounding states off-balance and incapable of united action against him.

77 BC

Although almost two millennia have passed, Chi is still not well understood in the West. The nascent Roman Empire in the Occident regards the study of Chi as a mere superstition, and thus turns its back on the greatest power in the world. The Servants of the God-King are still going strong, having co-opted the Ptolemaic dynasty after the conquest of Egypt by Alexander the Great. In the next few decades, they will make one last effort to bring the Romans around, but after the deaths of Julius Caesar and Cleopatra, their influence wanes rapidly. As a result, Chi power sites in that part of the world are beginning to lose their power.

In the Orient, things are somewhat different. Gao Zhang has begun his rise to power, and the Eaters of the Lotus are making a name for themselves, although still few in numbers and more thinly spread than they will be. Nevertheless, they are clearly a rising power to those who know, and the world is slowly changing in response to that fact. Partially under their influence, the Han dynasties that rule China are pursuing expansionist policies -- at present, there is a drive inland, and many of the Chi sites of Sinkiang and Tibet are threatened by the plans of Gao Zhang.

129 AD

By this point, the Servants of the God-King are a spent force. Some knowledge remains among the Druids of the British Isles, focussed by their standing stones and stone circles -- but the Romans are persecuting them with a will, and are destined to succeed in eliminating them almost entirely over the course of the next two centuries. Meanwhile, in the Far East, the Eaters of the Lotus are coming under ever increasing fire from their opponents, and their power is waning. At this point, they are happy to build slowly and carefully, awaiting the day that they will rise again. Thirty years from now, the Eaters of the Lotus will stretch forth their hand once more, and regain their lost power, only to wind up, eventually, being suppressed yet again. This pattern will repeat itself with only minor variations for centuries to come. The power of the Eaters of the Lotus slowly diminishes as the political and military might of Chinese rulers increases. Even so the Eaters of the Lotus will remain strong for centuries to come, finally being crushed by the Mongol invasions.

On the far side of the world, several Native American cultures have developed some understanding of Chi, although they have not systematized this knowledge to any great extent, and many sites remain undiscovered. Furthermore, the relatively small size -- and predominantly nomadic cultures -- make them not much of a threat. Even so, the Eaters of the Lotus occasionally send agents to the West coasts of both North and South America, to prevent the possibility of a threat arising from that direction.

1744 AD

The destruction of the last Native American civilization two centuries earlier removed the last serious threat to the power of the Ascended (and wiped out the only remaining stronghold of the Four Monarchs). The rationalist, scientific worldview that they espouse is gaining ground, and Chi power is weakening. This Juncture is characterized by European imperialism, largely at the behest of the Ascended, and for the purpose of wiping out opposing power groups and de-powering their Chi sites. Ironically, in doing so, the Ascended are creating the very conditions that led to the rise of both the Guiding Hand and the Rising Sons.

The power of the Ascended is close to absolute in the East. The only organized resistance comes from the Navigators -- and they are losing ground on an almost daily basis as the powerful nations of Europe bring ever greater amounts of the world under their control. Still, the Navigators have some life left in them yet, especially if they can succeed in making contact with the Dragons, and allying themselves to that group.

1910 AD

The 1910 Juncture is a Juncture in flux. The growing power of the Rising Sons, a largely Japanese-based faction group of the Jade Wheel Society, is unseen but greatly influential at this time. They seek to create a society and a technology not too dissimilar from that of the Architects in 2056. Already, they have gained much Chi power from the capture of several strategic sites in the Russo-Japanese War five years earlier, and they are behind increasing Japanese imperialism as well. Their major opponent is the Guiding Hand, and the eventual Japanese invasion of China in 1930's is the final and most overt phase of the conflict between the two. Fortunately, very few members of the Rising Sons survive after 1945 -- and the majority of them are re-absorbed by the Jade Wheel Society.

At this time, the Order of the Wheel (and to a lesser extent, the Jade Wheel Society also) is slipping from the grasp of the Ascended. A combination of technological advance and nationalist fervor is leading to increasing division within the ranks of the Ascended's servitors -- divisions their enemies try to exploit while the Pledged desperately try to stem the tide of history. In three years time, when the First World War begins, it will be obvious to even the most fanatical Pledged that they have failed.

2116 AD

It was a long and hard struggle, but the Jammers finally defeated the Architects. Unfortunately, in doing so, they pretty much ruined the world. Although World War Three was not a thermonuclear war, the devastation was nearly as great. Most of the planet resembles Europe after the end of World War Two. The cities are largely ruined, and the wilderness encroaches more by the day. The remaining humans cower in fortress towns, rarely with populations exceeding a single thousand people. Much knowledge of Chi has been lost, and there is no one group that can claim ascendancy. Isolated factions of the Architects, the Jammers and the Dragons still survive in the rare locations that still have a functioning modern technology, and each of them imagines that they are alone. Few venture into the blasted wasteland outside the cities, which is the domain of the Abominations. Millions of them, freed from all control and restraint, doing nothing but feeding, fighting and mating. Most of those who still live in the fortress-like townships consider themselves fortunate that the Abominations hate each other even more than they do the humans -- or else their protecting walls would soon fall before the beast. In truth, these conditions are just what the Four Monarchs have been waiting for, and in the wilderness areas, they are slowly building both Chi power and military strength. They're dominating or destroying the Abominations, and planning a reckoning. Of course, things might not go the way they plan -- if the Martyrs for Potemkin have their way, every human being on the planet will soon be nothing but a memory.

Modifiers for Arcanowave gear by Juncture

1858 BC: -3
77 BC: -1
129 AD: 0

1744 AD: +3
1910 AD: -1
2116 AD: -1

Supernatural Creature Action Value Modifiers by Juncture

1858 BC: +4
77 BC: +2
129 AD: +2
1744 AD: -1
1910 AD: -3
2116 AD: -1

Abomination Action Value Modifiers by Juncture

1858 BC: +3
77 BC: +1
129 AD: +1
1744 AD: 0
1910 AD: -1
2116 AD: +2

Sorcery Action Value Modifiers by Juncture

1858 BC: +4
77 BC: +2
129 AD: +2
1744 AD: 0
1910 AD: -2
2116 AD: +1

?

by Ken & Jo Walton

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Game Designer's Introduction

Ken & Jo's quest represents the sort of adventure that *Everway* is especially suited for. While quests and realms can vary as much as the gamemasters who create them, this quest has certain aspects that mark it as an *Everway* quest.

Ken & Jo use the concepts of elements and gates in a way that is at once new and consistent with the *Everway* background. The elements have a spiritual side, so the danger and challenge in the quest are spiritual as well as physical. While gates are often simply entry and exit points for a realm, the gate described here is at the heart of the issue.

The setting is highly unusual, so strange that it might not work as the setting for an extended campaign. But as a place to visit, as the site of a quest, it excels. Since *Everway* heroes travel from place to place, the gamemaster can present colorful settings like Brightwater and Deepwater, milk them for what they're worth, and move on. With so many different realms for heroes to explore, flights of fancy such as this one fit right in.

This quest also fits the *Everway* style in the way it leaves behind standard elements of fantasy (combat, conquest, the battle between good and evil) in favor of character interaction. The fun in this quest comes from the heroes interacting with the strange and even self-defeating people to be found here and solving a problem that isn't presented to them in the opening paragraph.

-- Jonathan Tweet, author of **Everway**

Where Water Crosses Water

This adventure concerns the linked realms of Deepwater and Brightwater. Brightwater is a mer-realm. Deepwater was once known as Golden Palms, and is slowly filling up with water because of an imbalance of the elements. The party must find a way to restore the balance. This is both a physical and a spiritual problem, and the party must find a way to solve both. Fifty years ago the priests of Water in Golden Palms tried to open a gate to a world more strongly aspected in Water. They were more successful than they had hoped, and found their way into Brightwater, where mer-folk and humans can breathe the water. There is now a thriving trade through the gate in pearls in one direction and coconuts in the other. The connection appears to be a good thing for everyone, and nobody wants to give it up. However, since the gate was opened the water level in Deepwater has been rising and now everyone there is living on islands which used to be mountain tops.

There are a number of ways the party could become involved. They could be summoned by the few remaining worshippers of the fire cult and begged to help. They could be advised by someone outside the realm that Deepwater

needs help. They could just stumble upon a gate leading to Deepwater. If they are seeking a realm which is highly water-aspected then Deepwater may be suggested to them.

If the GM wishes to add an element of urgency to the heroes' quest, they could be sent through by the powers that be in the realm next to Deepwater (suggestions could include Hard March or Heaven) -- the water has nearly risen to the connecting gate, and unless it begins falling within a month, the gate between the two Realms will be closed forever. If the heroes don't solve the problem and escape, they'll be trapped in Deepwater.

Note that the water isn't actually coming through the gate -- it is the spiritual imbalance, rather than the physical link which is causing the problem. The fears of the people in the realm next to Deepwater are probably groundless -- but this won't stop them closing the gate!

In any case, they should come into the realm through a gate from elsewhere to find themselves standing on a tiny rocky outcropping surrounded on all sides by sea. There are other islands visible not very far away, but out of comfortable swimming distance. The sun is shining, and the water is sparkling. There are many watercraft making their way between the islands. They are long canoes with square-rigged sails, and they all have three or four people in them. It's possible to wave and get the attention of one of them. They will take the party to the nearest settlement.

The Realm of Deepwater

Where Water Crosses Water: A Quest for Everway

Virtue: The Fish (The Soul Prevails)
Flaw: The Priestess Reversed (Impracticality)
Fate: The Phoenix (Rebirth vs Destruction)

The Usurper

This is the Usurper card for the realm of Deepwater, which should be used when the Usurper is drawn from the Fortune Deck:

The Fisherwoman

This card shows a woman leaning from a boat to draw in a huge fish. She is smiling, and looking at the fish, which is clearly a great prize. If she leans even a little further, the boat will clearly capsize, but she doesn't seem to realize. Upright the card means "winning a spiritual treasure," reversed it means "overlooking an obvious defect."

Rule: There is no overall ruler of the Realm. Local issues are dealt with by the elders of each island (mostly female, though a respected male may be allowed to join). The Priestesses of Water are the nearest thing to a ruling body for the entire realm, though their interests are narrow (hence the current problem).

Religion: The more intelligent and spiritually inclined of the fisherfolk are generally recruited by the Water Temples. Each settlement has at least one Water Priest. None of the fisherfolk are worried about the rising water level -- some of them believe that if the land is swallowed up they will be able to breathe their water like the people of Brightwater. Others refuse to believe that the water is rising. Despite this it should soon become obvious to the heroes that the water has risen appreciably and that soon there will be very little land left. The Priests of Fire are the most active in trying to stop the problem, but can think of little which will help. The Temples of Earth and Air have declined in influence and popularity, and few worship at them any more.

People: The fisherwomen are golden-skinned with slightly slanting eyes. They wear their hair coiled up in complicated twists, held in place with a sharp toothed bronze comb. This comb is also used for scaling and gutting fish. Their clothes are embroidered, often with watery motifs such as stylized waves, fish or mer-people. They are

concerned with the fishing, which is very good at this season. Their men live on shore and spend their time taking care of children, cooking and making ropes and nets from coconut fibers. They are almost all preoccupied with their complicated love-affairs and other emotional entanglements -- their descriptions of their lives and problems will remind any stranger of hearing an adolescent talking about themselves. They are usually cheerful and friendly to strangers. They are however curiously passive.

Economy: Most communities are self-sufficient, catching fish and growing small quantities of crops on the islands. There is some trade between islands, mostly of luxury goods such as fine embroidered clothing (each island has a different style) and carved bone jewelry. In recent years, pearls from Brightwater have become very fashionable, and are traded avidly, almost becoming a currency in their own right.

War: There has been no war in Deepwater for generations.

Technology: Most things are made of wood, stone or bone. Some metal is used but there has been no new mining since the water level has risen. This makes the metal combs much prized artifacts. The most advanced technology is boat-building, and the fisherfolk's small sailing craft are some of the most efficiently designed in all the Realms.

Learning: Learning used to be highly respected, taught by the priests of Air, but in recent years, people would rather have fun, and the old knowledge is being forgotten.

Domesticated Animals: There are few domestic animals. Some islanders keep pigs, and rarely, a fisherwoman will train a cormorant to help her fish.

Common Foods: Fish, coconuts, yams, pork and bacon on special occasions.

Outsider Contact: The pearl/coconut trade is very strong, though it is performed mainly by the priests of Water. The people of Deepwater are interested in people from other realms, and delight in gossip from far flung Spheres they are never likely to visit.

Finding Out What's Going On

The heroes may talk to the inhabitants of the village they arrive at, and learn the basic facts of the problem. But even though there is a problem, the villagers seem curiously unworried, and will be more keen to hear the latest gossip the heroes have to tell about Everway and other realms. If they are asked about the problem of the rising water level, they will direct the heroes to the Great Water Temple (see below). Otherwise they will spend an eventless evening, partying with the locals on the beach and generally getting nowhere.

If the heroes have not initiated anything themselves, have the Priest of Fire, Bushel, turn up the following morning.

The Great Water Temple

Rising from the water is a great blue and gold pagoda, rich with domes and fantastically ornamented. Everything is curlicued and elaborated with decoration. There are many mosaics with pearls inlaid in them, and pearls are a persistent motif. Once this temple stood by the shores of a lake, now it is mostly underwater. The above-water part of the temple is the seventh storey, and it is flooded inside. There is no dry land nearby, and very little flooring within the temple. Movement within the temple is by boat. The temple is a maze, with many shrines and living quarters. The Hall of the Dive contains a great altar and many niches filled with gilded statues of Water Gods. A faint glow can be seen from the water in this room, emanating from the Gate seven stories below. If the heroes are offered hospitality they

will be offered a room with boats made up as beds. If the heroes want to enter Brightwater they will have to win the confidence of the water priests to be taken down with breathing bags on their faces, or find some way of breathing while they sneak through the flooded levels of the temple making their way to the gate.

Standing Wave, The High Priestess

Air	4	2	**Fire**
Water	7	4	**Earth**

Magic: Open Chalice 3

The chief official of the Water Priests is the High Priestess, Standing Wave. She wears a dress richly embroidered with pearls in a wave pattern. She will listen to no talk about restoring fire, but will respect anybody with a high water-aspect. She will see through most deception. She will be reluctant to take any action and will spend a long time considering, but will have the party imprisoned if they continue to annoy her.

The Fire Cult

Ever since the Great Fire Temple was burned to the water-line in a last ditch attempt by the fire-priests to balance the elements, fire has been in decline in Deepwater. The few remaining adherents live in the drowned remains of the Old Capital. Whether they summoned the heroes or not they will try to contact them as soon as they hear about them. They are concerned about the rising water levels but have not been doing anything about it. They are the party's natural allies in this situation. They may be able to put the party in contact with wandering priests of Air who are the people who bring news from one island settlement to another, and with the priests of Earth whose mountain-top temple is still standing on dry land.

Bushel, The Priest of Fire

Air	4	4	**Fire**
Water	4	6	**Earth**

Powers: Priestly Rites (Fire) 1

The Priest of Fire is a likeable but rather bumbling man. He is aware that there is a problem in the Realm, but like most of the people, lacks "fire" and is very under confident about his ability to solve the problem. He is eager for the

heroes to do something before it is too late. Quite what should be done, he isn't sure.

Brightwater

Brightwater is entered through the gate at the bottom of the Water Temple of Deepwater. As soon as the heroes pass through the gate (which takes about four days of real time, but is a timeless drifting as far as the heroes are concerned) they will be aware of a difference. They are in an underwater corridor. The water is faintly lit, and the walls are made of glowing coral. The water is breathable. The passage is guarded by a school of tiny red fish, who will alert the mer-folk is anyone passes them. The walls are not ornamented, but everything is naturally brightly colored. The heroes will be taken before the mer-queen. There are many people in her throne room, mostly mer-folk with human torsos and fish tails, but some are fish. In one corner a green crab sits playing chess with a merman. Everywhere there is evidence of the coconut trade with Deepwater -- people are eating coconuts, wearing things made from coconuts and using things carved from coconuts. The people of Brightwater are completely unaware of any problem. They do not often go to Deepwater because they cannot breathe the water there and do not like being above the surface. If the problem is explained to them they will be concerned -- not that Deepwater is filling up, but that they may be losing water: "You mean the world is shrinking?" The queen, Golden Tail, will not tolerate rudeness or disrespect but will be generally sympathetic if the problem is explained. She will be reluctant to close the gate, but prepared to do so if convinced that her realm is in danger -- however, someone will need to close it from the other side as well.

Running this Adventure

This is a very open scenario, with what happens dependent very much on what the heroes decide to do. The problem is the imbalance of elements which must be restored. It is important to make this more than just a problem of rising water levels and to stress the spiritual imbalance. A good way of doing this is to make all the inhabitants of Deepwater very passive. Even the Fire Cult should say things like "We're so glad you've come to help us" and "Somebody must do something for us" and "It's past time something was done, I've been waiting for someone to do something for years." In fact, to restore the balance it is necessary to get them to do something -- Fire cannot be restored by the heroes acting alone. The GM may decide that whatever the inhabitants of Deepwater are stirred to do is sufficient, as long as they actually take some action. The solution may be to close the gate -- which will require action from someone on both sides. Alternatively it can be more abstract -- a powerful fire wizard could set off an extinct volcano, thus by the action of fire on earth and air creating new land and changing people's perception of their realm. (If none of the party have the ability to do this then there might be an old wizard who could be persuaded that she can and should do it.)

Suggestions for the GM

The heroes should be able to think of lots of things to do in this situation, but if they are getting a bit stuck, here are some ideas to throw at them:

- The Water Priestess may be hostile to the idea of closing the gate, and the heroes will have to sneak into the temple and find their way down through the many underwater levels, dodging guardian sharks, octopuses, or other hostile sea creatures.
- The gate must be closed using a special ritual which needs a person on either side of it. One of the heroes must volunteer to stay in Brightwater in order to close it.
- The heroes could find a group of disaffected islanders, who were fed up with the Priestesses of Water, and would be prepared to rise against them if given the proper leadership.
- The Priests of Fire could be involved in some last ditch attempt to save the world from Water by calling on all their powers. This will make the seas boil and destroy the realm -- can the ritual be stopped in time?
- If the heroes go straight to the Water Temple, an acolyte there could be a secret adherent of the fire cult and offer to take them to her grandfather, Bushel.
- Golden Tail could be so upset by the news that she immediately shuts the gate of her own volition, cutting off Brightwater -- but the water level keeps on rising in Deepwater.

- There might be an artefact made long ago in Deepwater -- for instance a Golden Palm from the time when the realm was called Golden Palms - which was traded to Brightwater long ago and which must be recovered before the water will stop rising. This artifact could have been traded to a distant mer-community and the heroes would have to quest for it through the mer-realm.
- The Priests of Earth are very resigned to the situation and refuse to help, saying "Everything will come out all right in the end." When it does, because of the heroes and other people's efforts, they'll say "I told you so!"

Boons

There are various things which could be given to the heroes as boons during the quest. Suggestions include the following (but don't give the heroes *all* these!):

- They could receive something to allow the heroes to breathe underwater. This could be some kind of magical talisman (a pearl if given by Queen Golden Tail, a tiny Golden Palm if given by Standing Wave) or a blessing from Standing Wave which gives the heroes a new Power.
- The Fire Priests could reward the heroes with magic knapsacks which will always keep their contents dry, or something similar connected with protecting against water.
- The people of Deepwater could reward the heroes with a number of pearls, or pearl-decorated jewelry, which could be valuable in other realms. Alternatively, they could give the heroes a magical fishing net, woven from coconut fibre, which will always catch fish if there are any in the water.

Note

This quest was originally run using photographs from *In Search of Burma* by Caroline Courtauld (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1984). The photographs of people in fishing boats and spectacular temples by the water were a major inspiration for the quest.

Our original playtesters (Nina "Striding Willow" Baur, Sebastian "Moss" Graubner and James "World Changer" Walkerdine) solved the problem by causing a volcano to erupt -- something we hadn't thought of, but which seemed so appropriate that we let it solve the problem.

Pyramid Review

The Ashen Knight (for Vampire: The Dark Ages)

Published by White Wolf Game Studio

Written by Robert Barrett, Bruce Baugh, Richard E. Dansky and Wendy L. Gash

128 pages, $17.95

Knighthood has been referred to before in *Vampire: The Dark Ages* books. Given the increasing importance of knights and knighthood during the historic medieval period, it was perhaps inevitable that White Wolf would release a sourcebook dealing specifically with knights in the Dark Medieval World. *The Ashen Knight* isn't exclusively a book of Cainite knights, but is intended to cover the whole range of interactions between chivalry and vampirism.

The opening chapter concentrates on an overview of mortal knighthood, with references to Cainite viewpoints of a certain factor or belief. The discussion of knightly virtues may be a little more advanced than the official time period of *V:TDA*, but would be useful to anyone running a knight. The topics, ranging from the economics of knighthood to female warriors, are covered in broad outline, but would provide enough information to start more detailed research.

The second chapter is another overview, but this time of the concerns of vampiric knights. It ranges from explaining why one cannot take part in a daylight tournament to which clans have the most knights among their numbers. This chapter goes into a bit more detail, since the topics are not ones that can be checked into at the local library.

The following two chapters deal with orders of knighthood. Chapter Three includes major orders such as the Templars, lesser orders such as the Order of St. Helena (one of the rare all-female knightly orders), orders that exist only in troubadours' poems such as the Order of the Civet, and all-Cainite orders such as the Order of Chanticleer. It also discusses rogue knights, who exist outside the feudal system, and the possibilities and perils in claiming to belong to an order that doesn't exist.

Chapter Four focuses on the Order of the Bitter Ashes, a devout Cainite order. This order is similar to the order of the same name in the *Grails Covenant* novel trilogy, but Storytellers who are fans of the novels will need to edit this section extensively. The knightly arm of an order of ancient Cainites, they work to protect holy relics (by taking them off to their storehouses, if necessary -- and it often is), guide other vampires on the path to redemption, and destroy any beings who serve evil. Full members of the order, called Grail Knights, have drunk from a cup believed by the Order to be the Holy Grail and gained great powers from it. This is one facet of the Order that needs much more detailing than it receives. The authors establish that a "fallen" Grail Knight will lose the powers granted by the Grail, but do not give any indication of what constitutes a "fall." This can be determined by story needs for NPC knights, but when a player character is offered the Grail Embrace (a drink from the holy cup) a more concrete guide is needed.

The final chapter focuses on character creation and game mechanics. The version of the Road of Chivalry given here fits with the rest of the book better than the original version. However, there are enough differences that any player running a vampire on the Via Equitum will need to discuss which version he follows with his Storyteller before the arguments over whether a given act violates his Road start. The authors suggest renaming the original Road of Chivalry from the core rule book; if both versions will be in play that would be an excellent idea.

Some of the Traits in this chapter are reprints from other *V:TDA* books, others are new. The authors brought in the older Traits for the sake of convenience; it will depend on the individual reader whether or not the convenience is

worth the repetition. Similarly, the game statistics for different grades of horses are reprinted from other sourcebooks.

After four chapters of "it's hard but possible for a female character to be a knight," it's a little jarring to be given a list of required "ladylike" skills for an upper class vampire lady that would take up almost a third of her starting dots. This list would have worked better as suggestions for a noncombatant noblewoman, especially since the only female character template in the appendix doesn't have all the "required" skills. While the first chapter has a balanced discussion of how a woman could become involved in war and battle, this chapter goes out of its way to make life as a female fighter "insanely difficult" (to quote one of the sidebars). Different viewpoints are common in multi-author works, but the authors should have chosen a consistent approach.

The book wraps up with four character templates and several NPCs that knightly characters could encounter.

Is this book worth buying? It depends on how important knighthood is to your storyline. If the only knights your group encounters are NPCs, you don't need this sort of detail. If you want to run a campaign straight out of the *chansons de geste,* or medieval romances (but with vampires), even with its flaws ***The Ashen Knight*** is worth having.

-- Leah Watts

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by Davide Amato

Art by [Christopher Shy](#)

These creatures are evolved dinosaurs, distant cousins of the Reptile Men (see *GURPS Fantasy*). They look like graceful, slender, two-legged, man-sized reptiles. When fully clothed, one of them could pass for a slim human if he does not speak and covers his face. They are omnivorous egg layers, warm-blooded, with light green or yellow scales. Their faces are like lizards'. They do not have claws, fangs or a ferocious appearance, so humanoid beings tend not to react at the -3 penalty that Reptile Men receive.

The race has a peculiar advantage called "Fast evolver." Over the course of few generations the race can develop useful physical or mental traits, adapting to their environment with amazing speed. In game terms, assume that during character creation a Reptilian can spend about 20 points in any racial Advantage/Disadvantage allowed to Earth-like creatures (See *GURPS Aliens*).

The Reptilian Race

These advantages are normally linked to some physical disadvantage and some skills, and given in an "Evolver module." The skills are only a product of education, but the disadvantages are part of the physical structure of the subrace, so nothing short of TL9 bioengineering can change this. Note that two Reptilians having different "Modules" can mate, but fertility will be greatly diminished. The offspring will *never* mix modules, but instead only take the mother's or father's module.

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The Fast Evolver is a "special effect", and the race does not have any peculiar characteristic, so the racial cost is zero. Note that a race so perfectly tailored for survival would quickly spread all over an Earth-Like world, unless confined by natural or artificial barriers. They can live comfortably in any natural environment, so they are unlikely to develop a technology past TL1. They simply do not need it.

Some advantages and disadvantages have been taken from the *GURPS Aliens* book, but they are fully described here, so that book is not required.

Some campaign hooks:

- The PCs are human settlers; the Reptilian Race are less-human natives.
- The PCs are fierce Reptilian Race natives, with low-TL, against human invaders with 1 or 2 TL over the natives.
- An adventure or campaign could focus around Reptilian Rune-Casters vs. Human mages.

Here are some Evolver modules.

Gecko Module

The subrace is very well adapted to the life on tops of trees or in dangerous mountain peaks.

- Individuals have suction cups on fingers, toes, knees, and elbows, allowing them to walk over walls and ceilings at half Move. An individual can stop at any point and stick to the surface without risk of falling. If an individual is falling and tries to grab a wall that's within reach, he must first make a DX and then a ST roll, the ST roll made at -1 for every 5 yards fallen. If the ST roll is failed, 5 yards are subtracted from the distance fallen.
- Individuals spend much time killing things with thrown weapons, so they learn Throwing at DX.
- Individuals spend nearly every waking moment doing acrobatic feats, so they will know Acrobatics at DX+1.
- The subrace has a light physical structure. Treat this as the Skinny disadvantage.
- To make themselves lighter and more agile, this subrace developed hollow, light bones. This will result in individuals taking double damage from crushing attacks (and falls!).

Module Cost: 17 points
Summary: Clinging, Throwing at DX, Acrobatics at DX+1, Skinny, Fragile
How to use: Very good at hunting and ambushing. Perfect for swashbuckling warriors.

Night Predator Module

This subrace is very adapted to night hunting, and can function well even in daylight.

- Infrared Vision: This subrace can see *only* the infrared portion of the spectrum, like the creature in the movie *Predator*. In game terms assume that they can see normally in daylight and in darkness, and that when fighting in darkness they suffer only a -1 by looking at the heat emissions of the foe (assuming that foe emits heat, of course).
- Infrared Vision has no sense of color. Treat this as the Color Blindness Disadvantage.
- Night Predators are good trackers, knowing Tracking at IQ, with a +2 bonus if the trail is less than an hour old (Tracking by heat emissions), but with a -1 for older tracks (because of the Color Blindness).
- Individuals are very trained at stalking silently at prey, and as a result gain Stealth at DX.
- The physical structure of the race is very well built to prowl silently in darkness. They get a +2 to Stealth if motionless, or a +1 if moving, but only when being seen is not a factor (in total darkness, for example, or against a blind creature).
- The subrace has an highly developed hearing sense. Give them a +1 to Hearing rolls.

Module Cost: 16 points
Summary: Infravision, Color Blindness, Tracking at IQ, Stealth at DX, Silence 1, Acute Hearing +1
How to use: Perfect assassins and thieves. Combined with a cowardly personality, they make excellent villains. Give them Night-Only Magery (*GURPS Magic*) and they will be perfect!

Chameleon Module

The subrace can blend into its surroundings and become noiseless.

- Individuals can change their skin colors, blending into the surroundings. They get a +4 to Stealth, but only when perfectly still; moving will forfeit this bonus. Note that the +4 bonus will apply only against those relying on sight to track.
- Chameleons can become totally noiseless. They get a +2 to Stealth, but only when perfectly still. Moving will forfeit the bonus. Note that the +2 bonus will apply only against those relying on hearing to track.
- Against normal chasers the bonuses mentioned above will add, giving a +6 to Stealth.
- Individuals are highly trained in stealthy movement, even without their special bonuses. They gain the Stealth skill at DX.

Module Cost: 14 points
Summary: Chameleon 2 and Silence 1 (modified), Stealth at DX

How to use: Patient stalkers, quiet and very deadly. Give them an introvert personality, a strong willpower, and some light weapon skill, and they will become the ultimate killers

Crocodile Module

This subrace is lightly armored and very adapted to underwater activity.

- Crocodiles have bony plates on their whole body (except for the eyes), giving them no inherit PD, but DR2.
- Given one second to fill their lungs, individuals can hold their breath for several minutes, even when fighting or doing very active movement. It will cost 4 fatigue for the first minute, and 2 each minute thereafter.
- Because of their build, they face a problem when walking; their walking Speed is reduced by 1.
- They spend much of their time swimming; as a result, give them Swimming at DX+2.

Module Cost: 18 points
Summary: Damage Resistance, Reduced Move, Hold Breath, Swimming at DX+2. (The Hold Breath effect is taken from the *GURPS Grimoire* and implemented using the Knack Rule.)
How to use: They have an advantage in their home, and do not want to lose it. They can be effective villains and good ambushers.

Ankylosaurus Module

The subrace is like a tank: slow but *very* well armored.

- Ankylosaurus members of the Reptilian Race are heavily armored by bone plates, giving them PD1, DR2 on their whole body (even their eyes).
- Because of the bony plates, their bare-handed attacks will do +2 damage.
- These plates also increase their mass. Their body weight is increased 10%; this will count as encumbrance, except when swimming.
- Move is reduced by 20%, then further reduced by 1.

Module Cost: 19 points **Summary:** Body of Stone x4, Reduced Move **How to use it:** They are *not* warriors; a slow warrior is a dead warrior. They will be calm, strong-willed and self-confident. They do not seek fights, but give a good beating to any would-be attacker.

Animal Shaman Module

This is the only module that can be combined with others. This represents the "Shaman," who talks with the spirit's World, as opposed to the classical Magician. It is *strongly* recommended this module be used instead of the standard Magery Advantage.

- Magery 1
- Animal Empathy
- Magic Susceptibility 2 (*GURPS Grimoire*: The opposite of Magic Resistance. Does not interfere with spellcasting)

Module Cost: 14 points
Summary: Magery 1, Animal Empathy, Magic Susceptibility 2
How to use: It could be used by adding Magery 2 or 3 for a spell-based mage, or used as it is for a Rune Mage.

Hypnotic Eyes Module

This subrace developed an useful natural attack: a peculiar eye movement capable of hypnotizing the unwary.

- Their primary attack is their hypnosis, giving them Hypnosis at IQ+5.
- Their acute vision provides them with the advantage of Telescopic Vision 2.
- Their sensitive eyes are also vulnerable to attack. As such, all damage done to the eyes is doubled.

Module Cost: 10 points
Summary: Hypnotism at IQ+5, Telescopic Vision 2, Weakness
How to use: This module requires cunning. The Hypnosis skill is useful, but only against one enemy at a time, and if it fails there will be some quick escaping to do. Note that this module will become useless in a culture where the Hypnosis skill is known and taught.

Pyramid Review

Rifts: Free Quebec

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by Kevin Siembieda & Francois DesRochers

192 pages, $20.95

This book, number 22 in the now long list of worldbooks created for Palladium's
successful *Rifts* line, is the second book created to cover the area known nowadays
as Canada, as well as the first to cover the Coalition War, first announced in *Coalition War Campaign* a long while
back.

As a sourcebook, *Free Quebec* fails in numerous areas; the level of actual background concerning the former
Coalition State of Free Quebec is covered in a dozen pages. What is given barely scratches the surface of what is
probably a fascinating culture of the new world that is Rifts Earth. One frustrating element of the book is that no real
attempt to explain the Quebec culture and their behavior is ever made, when a more careful exploration of Quebec's
past and present could be used to shine a new light on Free Quebec.

Speaking as an actual Quebecois, I can understand why our future descendants, the Free Quebecois of Rifts Earth,
would feel more self-sufficient from the CS. Even in our present, we French Canadians have always been more
independent from the rest of Canada, in all but actual national secession. We refer to this feeling as "Nationalism." We
people of Quebec consider ourselves a nation, more so then we consider ourselves Canadians. We have preserved our
own separate language, our own independent TV and Radio stations, our own publications, and our own education
system. Though technically under the care of the National government of Ottawa, Quebec (and, to some extent, all the
other Provinces) have always been more-or-less autonomous, relying on itself for problem-solving, and complaining
when the Federal Government interferes with its life. Now, taken into the context of Rifts Earth, we could explain that
Free Quebec's attitude towards Chi-Town is a continuation of this sensation of self-sufficiency and contempt for
"Federal Interference." But none of this is really explained.

Another point of interest is the unfortunate fact that Quebec's "Nationalist" movement is that it's essentially racist,
focusing around the rights and wants of White, French Catholics, who were the original colonists of Quebec before the
British took over. This focus on the White French, who consider themselves the "original owners" of the Province
(Native Americans not withstanding) is made almost to the exclusion of everyone else. In fact, the most recent
Referendum failed mostly due to the negative votes made by the growing minorities who aren't White, French or
Catholics. Extend this feeling of Elitism to the Post-Apocalyptic world of Rifts Earth, and one understands Free
Quebec's Xenophobia; it's an extension of the feeling that the Free Quebecois "rightfully" own the territory, and dislike
the idea of being displaced by anyone or anything. But again, no explanation is given beyond "This is how they are" is
given.

Not that accuracy of background information or detailed coverage of such information is a trademark of a Palladium
book. The book sections with the most details are the one detailing Free Quebec's military, their "Sûreté du Québec"
(the actual term for our Provincial police force) and the Free Quebec Navy. In those sections, we are given mostly
basic information on various forces, procedures and operations; we are also told to refer to other *Rifts* books for actual
OCCs and for the Navy's equipment. We are also told the Free Quebec navy is in many ways superior to Chi-Town's
own efforts in building a navy, but aren't given enough examples to warrant this call. We are told what OCCs are
appropriate or not in creating a Free Quebec campaign, but not much beyond a one page reminder of "Do's" and

"Don'ts." The simple lack of a timeline of the Province's history shows that no work is made to make us "believe" in that nation's existence as more then a source of OCCs and Toys.

And OCCs and Toys, the book does provide. Like any self-respecting *Rifts* Book, a third of this book contains four new OCCs: The "Descended" Glitter Boy Pilot (essentially a GB Pilot with a pedigree), The Glitter Girl Pilot (All female pilots trained in Espionage and Intelligence Gathering; covered in more detail with their own armor, the Glitter Girl), the Side Kick RPA (Basically the same as an Elite RPA Pilot from the *Rifts RPG* page 53, with a different specialized armor) and the Reload Team, which are the GB's maintenance crew/reloaders.

The Weapons section gives us yet another traditional *Rifts* tradition: a large selection of various Energy Firearms made by the locals, followed by Battle Armors and some Combat Vehicles. The following Robot Vehicles section reprints the stats for the CS UAR-1 Enforcer and the CS UAR-2 Abolisher, along with a new toy, the QR-3 Guardian.

The growing trend for Palladium to reprint stats they've put elsewhere is also seen here. In the Glitter Boys of Free Quebec section, the Original Glitter Boy stats from the *Rifts RPG* are reprinted for "gamer convenience," along with the new Glitter Boy variants made by the Province. *Free Quebec* also provides some background information detailing the place of the Glitter Boy in Free Quebec and why the Coalition dislikes them. Another piece of reprinted information can be found in the section on Cyborgs, where, amongst the new 'Borg types, is a reprint of the NGR Gold Type 'Borg stats, renamed the FX-340C Slasher.

The chapters on Old Bones describe an interesting town in which to have adventures or to launch adventures from. The "revelation" that Old Bones is really a front for Free Quebec activities is rather anti-climactic, though. The shops detailed in the map section make for some fun shopping, but not much else. The Conspiracy Theory Generator added to this section is of limited use, though, as there's only so much dice rolling one can do before the combinations get tiresome.

Finally, the Scenario seeds, using the now familiar "Hook, Line and Sinker" Palladium technique, do sound interesting, as long as one is role-playing a Coalition War Campaign. All the scenario seeds are linked to the war between Free Quebec and the CS. So if you just want a generic adventure in Free Quebec, you're on your own.

In short, *Rifts: Free Quebec* is a typical *Rifts* Worldbook. Whether this is a good thing or a bad thing is entirely up to you. I know this writer won't use everything in it, but there's some stuff I can salvage for my future *Rifts* campaigns. Maybe you will too.

-- Rolland Therrien

The Atlantean Missile Crisis

"Poseidia will be among the first portions of Atlantis to rise again -- expect it in '68 and '69 -- not so far away."
-- Edgar Cayce, life reading 958-3 (June 28, 1940)

Give Edgar Cayce his props. There are a limited number of years in American history where the rising of [Atlantis](#)
would seem almost normal, even expected in a way, but 1968 was definitely that kind of year. It may have bombed as
prophecy, but as a game setting -- call it Reality Cayce -- it's a natural. And having thus paid brief obeisance to the
gods of plausibility, we can elaborate on this psychedelic alternate Earth, a **GURPS Technomancer** variant where it's
not the Bombs, but the Bahamas, that bring the magic back.

"The magician and the other so-called Gods of our legends.
Though Gods they were --
And as the elders of our time choose to remain blind
Let us rejoice and let us sing and dance and ring in the new
Hail Atlantis!
Way down below the ocean where I wanna be she may be . . .
My antediluvian baby, oh yeah yeah, yeah yeah yeah,
I wanna see you some day."
-- Donovan, "Atlantis" (1968)

On January 30, 1968, in obedience to ancient spells cast millennia ago upon the continent's destruction, the western
reaches of the Republic of Atlantis materialized where the Bahama Islands had previously basked in the Caribbean
sunlight. An island only slightly smaller than Britain now sat fifty miles off the coasts of Florida, Cuba, and Haiti,
glistening with towers and pyramids of solidified crystal. Its tall, perfectly formed, bronze-skinned inhabitants set
about mastering this new world as they had their last, with sorceries and super-science inextricably entwined in crystal
matrices and the mighty powers of mentalics.

The hippie, anti-war, and counterculture movements embraced Atlantis, supercharged by the seeming realization of the
utopian dreams of the 1960s. The vegetarian, "tuned in" Atlanteans' open acceptance of magic and drug use, their
eager attendance at rock concerts and antiwar rallies, and their open disdain of the United States went even farther to
cement the Republic's position in the vanguard of the progressive movement. Fidel Castro's embrace of Atlantean First
Philosopher Zaren may have been driven by power politics, but it delighted radicals and enraged official Washington.
But political theater turned deadly serious after the assassination of Martin Luther King in April. Students and (as the
FBI alleged) Atlantean agents provocateurs established an "Atlantean Commune" in San Francisco and Berkeley that
easily drove off the National Guard with magical attacks. Riots broke out across America, and radicals siezed power in
Baltimore, Boston, and Harlem (after Columbia University students came out in support of the rioters). Mayor Daley's
storm-trooper tactics preserved government control in Chicago, but killed hundreds and further polarized the nation. In
August, the riots began in Miami, and Atlantean sorcerors burned the city nearly to the ground before the Army finally
broke through. Right-wing vigilantes, especially in the South, did even more damage to the fabric of America by
rounding up "freaks" and "longhairs" and lynching them.

"[I]n Atlantis before destructive forces arose -- associated with communications, lighter-than-air machines,
radioactive forces."
-- Edgar Cayce, life reading 1023-2 (Oct. 17, 1935)

While America reeled under this insurrection, Atlantis and the United States rapidly militarized the Florida Straits.
Atlantean-Cuban cooperation paid off with the outbreak of Atlantean/Communist-backed revolutions in Haiti, the
Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico. The Dominican Republic soon fell under Atlantean control, but Duvalier's
high-powered vodounist allies stalemated the rebellion, and the Puerto Rican revolutionary Armed Forces of National
Liberation (FALN) had only indifferent success against an overwhelmingly pro-American population with substantial
U.S. military stiffening. But, as Atlantis found itself involved in one guerrilla war, its sorcerous advisers in North
Vietnam enabled the desperate Tet Offensive to succeed, knocking the legs out of the American presence in Southeast

Asia and setting off sympathetic Communist revolts in Cambodia, Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

In Europe, the Atlanteans also gained strength as their Communist allies crushed the Prague Spring in Czechoslovakia and the students of Paris smashed Charles de Gaulle's government in May. By June, the occultist aristocrat Pierre Plantard de Saint-Clair had been elected President of the Sixth Republic, "le Republique Philisophique." Every nationalist, socialist, anti-American, radical movement in the world from the PLO to the IRA to the Japanese Red Army was adding (or reviving) an occultist wing and calling for Atlantean help -- and more often than not, getting it.

"Too many people are following the past. In this new space age, this is dangerous. The past is DEAD and those who are following the past are doomed to die and be like the past."
-- Sun Ra, 1973 liner notes to *Atlantis* (first recorded 1960)

The United States fought back, and although the loss of Vietnam was a blow to prestige and morale, it did enable the military to concentrate its attentions on the problem at hand. Every aspect of fringe physics from Townsend Brown's dielectric effect to the forgotten Tesla death-rays and particle-screens got a new, eager reading as Pentagon planners desperately tried to counter the Atlanteans' crystal-focus sonic weapons, contragravity vortex geometry, and sorcerous green and purple rays. As prototype after prototype scalar pulse-fighter or mercury-vortex flying wing rolled out of the secret labs, they joined the outgunned F-4 Phantoms and F-101 Voodoos in the "undeclared air war" over the Caribbean, squaring off against Atlantean vailxi and vimana craft of frightening maneuverability and deadly power. When the nuclear submarine *USS Scorpion* disappeared off the Azores, a shadowy sea war added its problems to American grand strategy.

"As for a description of the manner of construction of the [power] stone . . . in Yucatan there is the EMBLEM of same. Let's clarify this, for it may the more easily be found. For they will be brought to this America, these United States. A portion is to be carried, as we find, to the Pennsylvania State Museum. A portion is to be carried to the Washington preservations of such findings; or to Chicago."
-- Edgar Cayce, life reading 440-5 (Dec. 20, 1933)

While the Skunk Works and White Sands cranked out revolutionary aircraft and rockets, the Smithsonian and the University of Chicago launched their own crash program of occult and Atlantean research. Ancient hieroglyphic inscriptions, theosophical channelings, and Rosicrucian high magick -- no avenue could be overlooked in the government's desperation to close the "mystical gap" between Atlantis' sorceror-philosophers and "good old American know-how." The FBI's insistence on stringent loyalty and background investigations hampered recruitment of practicing magicians, and many American Indian shamans openly supported the Atlanteans in hopes of adding their reservations to the growing stretches of "Atlantean America." Eastern European and Cuban refugees, devout anti-Communists, could be fully trusted to work against the returned masters of sorcery, however. Under the direction of the University of Chicago's Mircea Eliade, the nucleus of MARPA (the Magical-Alternative Research Project Administration) came into being by late spring. Its first triumph was accidental -- a MARPA researcher, in Los Angeles to brief Democratic candidate Robert F. Kennedy on the Atlantean crisis, detected the mind-control spell on "zombie assassin" Sirhan Sirhan, saving the senator's life and exposing a major Atlantean double-agent ring in California. After Kennedy defeated Nixon in November, the grateful President-Elect made Eliade the brand-new Secretary of Magic and raised MARPA to a Cabinet-level agency equal to the FBI and the CIA. With Kennedy's inauguration in January 1969, although the Atlantean crisis has steadily worsened in real terms throughout the year, it looks like the tough, optimistic President may be able to reunite America and drive Atlantean Communism from its shores.

"We must conquer or be conquered! Are we not the master race?"
-- Atlantean Prime Minister Zaren (John Dall), in *Atlantis: The Lost Continent* (dir. George Pal, 1961)

The return of Atlantis has transformed at least the Caribbean basin and Bermuda Triangle into a "high-mana" zone, and the rest of the world into a "normal-mana" area with a few dead spots. Simultaneously, the sudden emergence into the psychic noosphere of Atlantis has awakened latent psis across the globe, and possibly even retroactively created such "fringe realities" as the Roswell crash or the Loch Ness Monster out of the collective unconscious. Finally, not only Atlantean superscience but the U.S. government's crash "hyperscience" programs (including, say, a possible

implementation of the Majestic-12 Roswell reverse-engineering program) allow for any kind of weirdtech from antigravity to battlesuits. In short, the game is wide open for characters of any type.

The campaigns can be of any type as well. PCs can be USAF pulse-jockeys fighting Atlantean plasma craft over Puerto Rico, radicals fighting to build their own magical utopia somewhere in America's cities, Atlantean agents warring against the "materialist" enemy, MJ-12/MARPA action teams (or, better yet, **Black Ops**) out to steal Atlantean crystal secrets, Green Beret *Special Ops* in a losing war in Vietnam or an ugly one in Haiti, or just "normal folks" suddenly caught up in a chaotic America and just trying to do what's right. Atlantis can be a utopian "pure" post-economic communist republic, a Platonic caste society, an inhuman hive-mind state, a totalitarian dictatorship, a fine-tuned fascist machine, a cynical Soviet-style monument to cruelty and decadence, a fanatical theosophist theocracy, or just about anything except a democracy, depending on the GM's notions of politics or drama. The future can see continued breakdown of the United States and a new civil war between "straights" and "freaks," a more conventional struggle against an alien enemy as more and more of the American radicals realize they've been duped, the sudden emergence of more wild cards from the Antarctic Space Nazis to the Nine Unknown Sages of Shangri-La, or anything else under the sun -- or, rather, under the sea.

The Charge of a Static World

or, "There's No Place Like Ohm"

All right, Pyramidians, this week may be a bit more disheveled than normal, because I'm currently in hour thirty-six of "Steven's Splitting Headache," the wacky live action game of pain and misery. If my words make no sense, don't blame me; blame the dark fetal form growing in my skull.

Anyway, last week *Pyramid* hosted a chat with Gareth-Michael Skarka, creator of the upcoming game *UnderWorld*. At one point in the interview he said that there wasn't going to be a metaplot, which met with resounding applause and cheers from the other chatters. At least in public, I seemed to be the only one there who saw the appeal of both approaches; I've enjoyed roleplaying games that were both dynamic and static.

So, since I spend more time arguing with myself than most other people, I felt it would be ginchy to look at both sides of the issue. This week I'll look at static game worlds, next week dynamic.

But first, some terminology. "Static" means staying the same; "dynamic" means changing. A couple folks in the chat room argued that there was a third category of "metaplot." I argued that "metaplot" (as a derogative) was really a term for a "dynamic" story that was "garbage." But I'll talk more about that next week.

Anyway, static. Like fairy tales, football, and family reunions. (See how I used the word "football?" This way I *could* be talking about popular sports in either country, and thus hopefully avoid offending our non-US readers. A wily editor am I, eh?) You can listen to a fairy tale, or watch a football game, or visit a family reunion, and be confident that the base conditions that make you enjoy (or not enjoy) these things will remain the same. A fairy tale will start out with "Once upon a time" and end with "and they all lived happily ever after." A football game will begin with a whistle and end with a score. A family reunion will begin with a pinch to the cheek and end with Uncle Morris vomiting in the punch bowl. (By the by, I'm talking about the modern perception of the fairy tale. I *know* about the ones where the kids get stuffed into ovens, eaten by witches, and other instructive metaphoric parables. "Don't confuse me with facts; my mind is made up.") Sure, along the way there can be many surprises within these events, but a football game will seldom end (for example) because one of the players is revealed to be the long-lost father of someone on the other team. Deep down, these events are comforting because of their rigidity.

So, too, is the static game world. You begin with a premise: a game of clones doing the Computer's bidding. A game with goblins in a Victorian England. A game of unspeakable horrors and the people who lose against them. And then you do something very special with this premise: Nothing. You make sure that premise stays the same, that world stays the same, and the elements that make that game special and appealing (or unappealing) stay the same.

Static is appealing because you know that, no matter what, you won't ever be placed in a position of feeling obliged to follow someone else's storyline or world developments. It won't ever be revealed, for example, that Cthulhu is devoured by Googoogachulu, a bigger, badder-of-buttock nemesis that just *happens* to have coincidentally been created by a new line editor. You can look through new supplements and additions to the static game, confident that, if you don't like it, you don't need to use it. *Forgotten Realms*, for *AD&D*, is relatively static; as such, if you don't like the *Al-Qadim* Arabian Nights-esque setting, or the *Kara-Tur* Asian-esque setting, or the *Spelljammer* Flying-Boats-In-Space-Bwah-Hah-Hah-esque setting, you do not need to buy them, and the world will go on (so to speak).

Another appeal of the static world is the fact that players (and GMs) can feel free to have adventures of tremendous scope and importance, without fear that their actions will be "invalidated" or rendered moot by some other supplement or world plot development. If a game book details some temple of chaos ruled by an insane despot, then he's gonna be there 'til he's taken care of by the players (or some other GM plot). If a GM wants to create an over-arching mastermind who's behind many of the plots in the game books, s/he can do such, secure in the knowledge that the game company won't reveal their own over-arching mastermind. The players can be (or become) the most important people in the game world, and the game world won't contradict that by showing off *their* own most important people in

the game world.

Finally, static game worlds are comfortable for many genres. From a fantasy world where the sleepy village of Middletown remains eternally constant, to a four-color superhero world where Colonial Superb fights an unending battle for peace, to a cliffhangers world set in a 1930's eternally on the brink of war, it's nice to know that the basic premise of some games will remain as constant as. . . well, a football game.

Of course, static worlds are not without their problems, many of which I'll try to address next week. But for now, I'll point out that static game worlds which are popular (read: sell well) seem to be rare; **Call of Cthulhu** and **Forgotten Realms** seem to be the only two I can conjure off-hand. I don't count the myriad of **GURPS** worlds, simply because it's easy to stay static with only one book; but I *am* deeply curious to see how **Transhuman Space**, with its six books in a static universe, does.

And next week I'll talk about dynamic worlds. In the interim, feel free (as ever) to discuss this in the newsgroups, the chat room, or drop me a [line](#).

* * *

I'd like to point out to everyone that, thanks to the tireless efforts of our all-powerful webmaster, the per-article voting is now at the bottom of each article. Now, originally I *was* going to concoct a story about how my headache is being caused by demons trying to claw their way out of my skull, and how they would escape *unless* you all voted "5." But I decided against that; after all, the point of moving the vote thingee was to give you, our readers, a better opportunity to reflect your thoughts and opinions, so we could know more accurately what works and what doesn't.

On the other hand,. *(wicked grin)* I don't have much evidence that there *aren't* demons in my skull. . .

But seriously, please vote.

Thanks.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Flight from the Dark (Book one of the **Lone Wolf** series), Paragraph 1.

(Two stars) "9. It is illegal to be a Cyborg, Ghoul, Hobgoblin, Orc, Troll, or a Warrior of Chaos."

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Diablo II: The Awakening (for AD&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written By by Bruce R. Cordell and Mike Selinker

128 pages, $22.95

Diablo II: The Awakening is one of WOTC's new *Diablo II* cross over
supplements. Unlike the *Diablo II Adventure Game*, this supplement provides full
rules for incorporating the world of *Diablo* all the way into *AD&D 2nd Edition*
rules (No, they're not using the upcoming *3E* rules). The *Diablo* fans have been eagerly awaiting this book, both in
hopes of adding a little *Diablo* spice to their campaigns as well as the opportunity to catch a sneak peak at the
upcoming and much anticipated *Diablo II*.

The good news is that the sourcebook does a very good job of translating the world of *Diablo* into *D&D* terms. If you
are at all familiar with the computer game, then you know that *Diablo* is basically the ultimate dungeon crawl. Brave
adventurers delve deep into the infernal pits and twisted catacombs of the underground, all in the hopes of slaying
large quantities of monsters and bringing back very, very large sack loads of treasure (And maybe even completing a
quest or two along the way). Well, that's what this supplement is all about.

The book presents us with the five new character classes that will be available in the upcoming *Diablo II* PC game.
They include the Amazon, the Barbarian, the Paladin, the Sorcerer, and the Necromancer. The first thing one will
notice is that these characters are all very, very tough. The power level in a *Diablo* campaign is much, much higher
than in a normal *D&D* campaign (and the book is actually very forward about this). Although these characters are
termed 'kits' in the book, they are all truly more like entirely new classes, each with its own set of unique skills and
special abilities (termed proficiencies, although they're *much* better than any *D&D* proficiency I've yet to see).

Nonetheless, these characters are all very cool and exciting to play. As mentioned, each class has a set of abilities
unique to itself. Some of them are basically spells (or work as spells), while others are different proficiencies that are
all very neat. The vast majority of these abilities are combat related, as that is clearly the emphasis of the game. There
are over a hundred new spells, all of which are very dynamic and most of which are very different from your standard
D&D fare. The few *D&D* spells (There are about five of them) that actually made it into this supplement are even
reworked into *Diablo* terms, keeping the overall feel of it unique and much like the video game.

One of the most interesting aspects of the book is its equipment section. Their has been a little bit of hype about this
supplement somehow boasting over a million new magical items. "But how can that be? It's only 128 pages!" you ask.
The answer is both simple and inventive. The authors use what they term "Combinatorials." Basically, when you get a
magical item, you roll on a random table. Except instead of just rolling once for the item, you roll up to three times, for
both the root, the prefix, and the suffix. So you might roll a root of *Great helm*, a prefix of *Godly*, and a suffix of *of
the Colossus*. Then you'd have yourself a *Godly Great Helm of the Colossus*, which would grant you an AC of 4 on the
head, a +5 to overall AC (+6 vs. Missiles), and +30 hit points. The bonuses are all held within the prefixes and
suffixes. Being that these are rolled randomly, the results can be both pretty weird and pretty darn cool. Being that
there are over a million possibilities, each item you roll becomes fairly unique, since there's little chance of it being
rolled again.

The book also boasts over a hundred monsters, each taken straight from the *Diablo* world. Again they use a somewhat
similar formula for generating a lot of monsters in only a few pages. They basically take twenty-six monsters and

present them with four or more variations on the basic one. So instead of just a Magma Demon, you get a Magma Demon, a Blood Stone, a Hell Stone, and a Lava Lord. This has a couple of down sides to it. The first is that the detail level on each individual creature is very brief, limited to the stat chart and a brief paragraph or two. This is okay for basic creatures, but some of the more interesting ones (like the Dark Paladin, the Spider Magus, and Blood Lord, for example) suffer quite a bit for this. The second downside is that this technique strongly plays up the fodder aspect of the monsters. Each is basically just a set of stats with a short description and an attack method. But on the other hand, this is actually a very strong representation of the game. You take one monster graphic, give it four different colors, and each color a different number hit points and damage dice. In the end they all become fodder anyway. The book even gives tips on how to manage mass amounts of creatures using video game strategies.

So now you are asking yourself where all those other new features are that we heard about *Diablo II*. Where are the four towns, the all new quests, the multiple dungeons, and new NPCs? Well, it seems our friends over at Blizzard didn't want to spill all of the beans on their upcoming game. So the final section of the book is not a detailed map and quest set in *Diablo II*. It is instead the entire *Diablo I* game translated into pencil and paper.

While this may not sound to exciting at first (especially for those of you who've played it through umpteen million times), it is actually very good. The game is translated well, with full stats and descriptions on everything in the game (with the one exception that the map is set and not randomly generated). All of the quests from the original game have been included, and the authors have even made sure to put optional twists on each, so that there is something new in there even for those who've memorized the game.

Never fear though, because WOTC has promised us more *Diablo* material later on, which is not to mention the soon to be released ***Starcraft/Alternity*** cross over. Overall ***Diablo II: The Awakening*** is a very good book. It does an excellent job of translating a classic dungeon crawling video game into ***AD&D*** rules, providing DMs with not only a cool campaign world, but also an immense amount of new skills, spells, monsters, and items that will bring a unique (albeit powerful) twist to any campaign.

-- Jon Thompson

by David M. Kilpatrick

Art by Phillip Reed

Erahu (Homo Eridanius)

The Eridani, or Erahu as they call themselves, are a race of being that inhabit the twilight world of Nehoa'Eh circling the star 40 Eridani. Once a fierce warrior race, after the War of Madness they became a race of stoic idealists dedicated to protecting the younger races from the atrocities that had occurred when those other races learned too much too quickly.

The Erahu closely resemble humanity in build, possessing frames of comparable size and shape. They are standard humanoid stock in that they have 2 arms, 2 legs and 5 digits on each foot and hand. Physically Erahu approach the human norm of size and shape differing from the standard genetic human stock only in skin, hair, and eye color. The typical male stands between 5 1/2 feet to 6 1/2 feet tall and weighs in around 200 pounds while the female stands around 5 to 6 feet in the height and weighs about 150 pounds. Erahu skin tones generally range from a very light sandy gray to a dark charcoal gray with shades in between being the most common. Erahu eye color is universally a deep semi-luminescent red. Erahu hair grows into a natural widow's peak in front and is typically worn in a long braid down their back; the color of the hair ranges from steely gray to jet-black with rare cases of white. Male and female share genitalia similar to their human counterparts and have complex mating rituals, often considered highly erotic by other races. Erahu posses 5 digits on each limb ending in a nail similar to a human's.

The garb of choice among most of the Erahu population is functional trousers and vest for males and halter-top and short knee length trousers for females. Both sexes wear knee high soft leather boots and tie their hair back with ribbons.

They are native to a temperate 1.1-G world, with an average temperature of 80 degrees and a somewhat low-oxygen atmosphere at .80 pressure.

Advantages and Disadvantages

Erahu have DX +1 (10 points), HT +1 (10 points), and IQ +2 (20 points). Their genetically altered physiology gives them 12 levels of Fearlessness (24 points), 3 levels of Hard to Kill (15 points), and Disease-Resistance (5 points). Naturally occurring they have slow regeneration (10 points), Infravision (15 points), Light Sleeper (-5 points), Cyber Rejection (-10 points), Color Blindness (-10 points), Vampiric Dependency (-50 points), Social Stigma (Race of 'vampires' -5 points), and Extended Life Span (5 points).

It costs 34 points to be an Erahu.

Names

Erahu use a simple naming convention consisting of a personal name and the word *do* (translates *to*, *of*, or *from*) appended to the place of the individual's birth or the season of birth. Among nobles however this is slightly altered. Among nobles the place or time of birth is replaced with the name of the birth mother. Most Erahu names follow the normal pattern of the Erahu language, favoring the vowel sounds *ah* and *u* with hard *n* consonants. Some examples are; Nehala do'Nahale or the noble Erahn do'Ehnana.

Psychology

The Erahu could be best described as a race of warrior poets, an entire race dedicated to helping the younger races of the galaxy bypass the atrocities and mistakes of their galactic progenitors. Calm, collected, and given to be impulsiveness the Erahu people can make fast friends or a vicious enemy depending on how you strike them.

Erahu history from before the Time of Madness is sketchy at best. Many records were lost during the wars and times of upheaval. What is known, however, is that modern society today is much more peaceful than the previous society. The few records other races have of this time period mark the Erahu as fierce warriors that would fight to a bloody end no matter the cost to themselves; indeed this tendency seems to have almost brought an end to their race.

Now, though, the Erahu tend to act with kindness and fairness in their dealing with others, accepting another person's faults and failings as part of what makes them a unique individual. But this had to come at a high price.

Thousands of years ago when their world was still green and the new race of Erahu had not yet arisen, Erahu boasted a patriarchal warrior society. Men fought the wars, women cared for the babies and thought up new ways for men to fight wars. Now millennia later a gender reversal has come about. Women now act as their male counterparts did centuries earlier; one of the only true matriarchal societies has now arisen. The male population is rather stoic and chooses to follow orders rather than give, but some males are born with enough of the original Erahu lineage in their blood to be leaders. This tendency in males is rare, however, and now almost universally the women lead.

Ecology

The Erahu were originally descended from jungle canopy-dwelling primates that subsisted off of blood and small amounts of flesh rather than vegetation. Approximately 10,000 years ago the original Erahu society appeared with a TL of about 6. Records of an earlier society can not be found nor can any fossil evidence be found of an ancestor between the original primate and the pre-Madness Erahu.

Nehoa'Eh was once a lush world covered totally by rain forests; now it only has one small band of forest stretching the length of the planet around the equatorial region. The rest of the plant was scorched and burned by the invading fleets during the Time of Madness, approximately 7,000 years ago. This fortunately has changed and once where there was lush jungle (and then blasted earth) is now lush grass and prairie land. The environmental engineering done after that devastating war is today considered one of the greatest feats of terraforming ever.

The Erahu dietary requirements are very similar to that of the vampire legends of Earth, so much in fact that many humans will refuse to eat or socialize with Erahu. They require about 4 pints of blood a week and about 6 ounces of flesh, preferably raw. Most of this requirement is met by the consumption of a small animal called a meklik which is raised domestically for food.

Erahu are a long-lived race, usually living for about 160 standard years. Erahu young reach majority at the age of 25 and begin aging around 100.

Culture

One of the biggest distinguishing factors of Erahu culture over the rest of the known races is that the Erahu have a totally matriarchal culture. Women take on the traditional male roles of society, being the warriors, builders, and thinkers. Males tend to take a more effeminate role in caring for the young, being teachers, keeping the home and generally taking care of domestic needs and services.

This is by no means a cultural prejudice; in fact, males are encouraged to take part in other aspects of society. Rather, the majority of the male population still has some amount of the biologically manufactured subservience to authority that was engineered into the genetic super warriors of the Time of Madness. This causes the males to be somewhat submissive to the demands of those who assert themselves and it is a well-known fact that an Erahu female can be very assertive.

The Erahu are a culture steeped in ritual and tradition. One or both parents teach the young at home all skills necessary to make it in the world as unskilled labor. On reaching the age of majority, young Erahu have several choices of a future path. They may enter into military service, which will provide for them for life and teach hem to be the best soldiers possible. Alternatively, a young Erhau may choose further schooling. Higher learning has no cost other than keeping one's grades up. Failure to comply will result in expulsion from school and a life among the masses of unskilled laborers.

Politics

The Erahu choose to take an advisory position in galactic politics. Never actively pushing in any one direction, merely offering advice. Advice the younger races tend to wisely heed.

Little is known of Erahu internal politics other than a semi-feudal system is a work with nobles answering to an Empress-like figure known only as the Dark Lady. Apparently ageless, she guided the council of elder that governs the Erahu for apparently 5000 years at least. She is, in actuality, the scientist that created the super solider alteration program that changed Erahu males into super soldiers and came up with the forced vat grown process of growing new ones. In despair over the losses her people incurred and caused she became the only female to use the process. It transformed her into an ageless being.

Adventure Seeds

The Erahu

The Guardians of Yesterday: Mysterious warriors of the Erahu that guard the ancient city of Ne Nagada. The 'Silicon Valley' of the Erahu. They appear as females encased in a skintight shimmering veil of gray energy. They are silent and show no hint of fear. They carry no weapons other than shimmering swords and shields made of pure energy. They show no mercy towards intruders...Save one, the Dark Lady herself. What secrets of this race's dark past lie buried here, or perhaps are best left buried?

The Dark Fleet: Reports have filtered in of ships of Erahu design raiding convoys on the frontier. Survivors report boarding parties of entirely male composition that fight with inhuman strength and savagery. Who are these mysterious pirates? Are they privateers? Or are they relics of the past?

The Methuselah Factor: If the Dark Lady was made ageless by the genetic alteration process that created the super soldiers. What happened to this technology? Did other females ever use it? Was she a fluke or accident?

Pyramid Pick

Bastion of Faith (for AD&D)

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Bruce R. Cordell

96 pages, $16.95

Bastion of Faith is the third product in a series that details one of the four core
character classes, the other two being *College of Wizardry* for mages and *Den of
Thieves* for rogues. This time around, the priest is given a home, patrons, friends
and allies that can aid his cause. The Bastion is the name for the Church of Heironeous and gives the DM enough
details to choke a horse.

Detailing not only the upper levels of power in the priesthood, *BoF* gives a summary of the different members of the
church. Some of these levels have places, it notes, that player characters might fit right in. One of the nice things about
the roster is that there are several 1st level characters with names that a GM can just scoop up and use as player
characters. Not a priest? That's fine. Thieves who worship Heironeous are called inquisitors, fighters are templars, and
mages are catechists. There are solid benefits to joining the church because the faithful gain spell-like abilities as they
rise in level. For example, a 7th level inquisitor may use the wizard spell Friends, and the priest spell Detect Lie. In
addition to the roster, there are fourteen full write ups that include history, personality, statistics, possessions, and
illustrations.

One of the interesting twists is the introduction of favors. A favor is paper money that the church gives out instead of
gold. These favors can be redeemed for spells such as Cure Blindness or Detect Magic. One favor is worth 10 gold
pieces. The church doesn't sell favors, but uses them to pay for any purchases it makes. Favors come in three styles,
psalm (1), prayer (10), and benediction (100). The favors add another touch that can be used in an everyday campaign
without overusing them.

The Bastion itself is described in detail with over seventy rooms. Some, like the Cells, have great little extras; a table is
rolled on to see what unique contents are in them. Some of these random items are great, like a magically animate
glass raven, or a living salamander that can answer a question once a day like an Augury spell. Of course, no Church
of Light would be complete without some horrible undead wandering their catacombs; *Bastion of Faith* may start off
small with skeletons, but ends big with a master vampire. Even better, though, is that there is a good reason why these
undead are here, though the Church hasn't figured it out yet.

The new spells in *Bastion of Faith* are broken up into three different categories. The first are the spells that Heironeous
grants, seventeen spells ranging from first to seventh level. The Glyphs are the most useful in that they have
subcategories. For example, there are six common types of Glyphs, five Glyphs that can be used with weapons, as well
as a dozen Restricted Glyphs and nine beneficial Glyphs. This book has illustrations of 35 Glyphs, and provides the
GM with a great visual tool. The Penitent Fragments, the lost part of the book of Penitence, has four new spells; all
seem like they might be useful in the pursuit of justice, but are they? The last are the Hextorian spells. My favorite
Hextor spell is Battlearms, which creates two or more extra arms for the caster to fight with. There are also
suggestions as to what other gods would grant these spells if the Bastion is not used in *Greyhawk*.

The Bastion owns several new types of magic items, as well as several unique ones. Candleholders, rarely seen as
magic items, have four new types. The unique battle axe Liberator and the mace Torrent are detailed, as well as
numerous types of holy trappings ranging from consecrated holy water to prayer beads of spell storing. Some of the

items are interesting in that they're not often used, like candleholders and the Everfull aspergillum, while others like the surplice of protection, offer practical magic that most characters can use.

Bastion of Faith can be tied into the previous books, **College of Wizardry** and **Den of Thieves** through use of the NPC's provided. In addition, there are several suggestions for using this product not only in **Greyhawk**, but discontinued settings like **Dark Sun** and **Birthright**. Only **Ravenloft** and **Mystara** seem left out of the list.

Heironeous and Hextor are both detailed in a **Faith and Avatars**-style. This includes their priesthood, holy days, specialty priests, and history. Many fans suspect that Eric Boyd, one of the core writers of the popular **F&A** series, is given credit for his design and editorial assistance for this work, and it shows in the quality of writing.

Mini-adventurers are great for starting GMs, or those who lack the time to make their own. **Bastion of Faith** has five adventurers that start off low, but can (with a little tweaking) accommodate many levels. The adventure "I'm on a Mission" is a great mid-level scenario with its own map that seems to involve only goblins, but any goblins who can hire ogre mercenaries are doing something right.

The format of **Bastion of Faith** is double-columned with dense text. Special sections are boxed off and colored in gray. Fans of **Greyhawk** will be pleased with the references to numerous **Greyhawk** products. It does a good job of showing that this product wasn't just pushed out the door. When you read about Heironeous, the author lays out the numerous products that Heironeous has been in previous to this book. The fact that this book costs the same as last year's **College of Wizardry** and is perfect-bound only adds to its value. The only thing that could've added to this product would be a full color detachable map. Bastion of Faith is a great product that GMs will use for months, if not years.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Pick

Guardians of the Caerns (for Werewolf the Apocalypse)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing](#)

Written by Forest B. Marchinton, Deena McKinney, and Ethan Skemp

108 pages, $15.95

In the May 12, 2000 [Random Thought Table](#), Steven Marsh discussed the need for adventures where the PCs do not save the world. Instead, he suggests, it is occasionally nice to just let the characters (and players) experience what day-to-day life is like. Unfortunately, this has always been more of a challenge to the *Werewolf* GM than it should have been. While the basics of Garou society were discussed, many key questions were never answered. We've always known that the center of a werewolf's daily existence is his local caern, but what is that caern like? How many guardians does a typical caern have? What does it feel like to cross the bawn? How is living space apportioned at Shadow Lord caern? A Child of Gaia one? Are kinfolk allowed into the caern center? With this new volume, these (and many other) questions are finally answered. As the back promises, we no longer have to wonder about what it is that Garou do all day.

As usual, the book begins with a "Legends of the Garou" story, one that is of minimal interest. A small introductory section presents the format of the book along with some new caern types. Although rare, Caerns of Memory, Love, and Unity now exist, along with five others.

The rest of the book is split up into four chapters. The first, "Of Caerns, Sorrows, and Joys" is one of the best portions of the book. Centering on the general aspects of caern life, it discusses caern layout, economics, local relations, defenses, and spirits. Of especial interest here is the expanded material on geography. Although such caern areas as the shrines, the graveyards, and the living quarters have been described before, significantly more detail is included here.

The second chapter, "Tribal Lines," goes into details of what the caerns of a particular tribe are like. From the artificially ominous and menacing caerns of the Shadow Lords to the beautifully groomed and maintained lands of the Fianna, the book provides background detail and descriptions that will allow a GM to breathe life into even minor caerns. Additionally, the caerns, dens, and wallows of the other shapeshifting races are detailed.

The third chapter, "Digging In," is the last to deal with caerns in general. Divided into two parts, the chapter begins by detailing the officer positions of a typical sept. In addition to the familiar Warders and Gatekeepers, a host of minor offices are described, with special emphasis on allowing PCs to fulfill them. To one who is capable enough and ambitious enough, even the most coveted of positions is now attainable. In the latter part of the chapter, the Rite of Caern Building is discussed in great detail. From discovering the site, to gathering the Garou, to enacting the ritual, one of the most monumental rituals of the game is now fully described.

Finally, the fourth chapter does not deal with caerns at all. "Not of Garou and Kin Born" discusses one of the most fascinating elements of *Werewolf*: the metis Garou. In addition to a slew of new gifts, merits, and deformities, the life of a metis is described in great detail. Birth, adolescence, adulthood, and even death are very different for these werewolves. This chapter discusses their lifecycle (including the ever-present question: do metis go through first change?), their place in society, and their relationship to other Garou. Additionally, a fairly extensive "in-character" section discusses the attitudes of each tribe to their, and other peoples', metis. Some notes on roleplaying a metis and

bios of some renowned metis round out the chapter.

The artwork, much of it by Ron Spencer, Brian LeBlanc, and Joe Corroney, is up to White Wolf's usual standard: good to excellent. While the layout and organization is good, the book, as usual for White Wolf, suffers for lack of an index. Nonetheless, I found this to be one of the best, most useful, and most interesting publications for the *Werewolf* line. I highly recommend it.

-- Juliean Galak

Pyramid Review

Apocalypse (for CORPS)

Published by [BTRC](#)

Written by Ed Rice

**128 pages, $17.00 (hardcopy/paperback), $8.50 (.pdf format
from [HyperBooks Online](#), where you can also download a
free sample; or from [fatbrain.com](#))**

BTRC has received a fair amount of criticism for failing to adequately
support its *CORPS* universal role-playing system with campaign
supplements and worldbooks. *Apocalypse* is an interesting new setting for
CORPS, if not a great one.

Apocalypse is a *very* dark setting. It details an alternative history where the use of atomic weapons in World War II
allowed a host of supernatural horrors and extra-dimensional beings to invade -- and eventually conquer -- the earth.
In many ways, the ideas behind the setting of *Apocalypse* are reminiscent of Paladium's *Rifts* (and even *GURPS
Technomancer*), though *Apocalypse* doesn't appear to suffer as badly from *Rifts*'s mish-mash of magic, alien races,
high technology, and power gaming.

The first section of the book, the introduction and world background (22 pages), provides a detailed timeline, 1941 to
the present; an explanation of the supernatural event (the "Juxtaposition") that created earth's problems; and a
description of the various extra-dimensional races, undead monstrosities, and supernatural beings that now inhabit the
earth. While some of these races are a bit two-dimensional, several are well done and could be easily lifted into other
campaigns in need of new villainous races.

The next section (28 pages) details character generation in *Apocalypse* and paranormal abilities, including psionics,
necromancy, sorcery, ritual magic, and devotional magic (quasi-ritual magic that comes from serving the Eternals,
Apocalypse's angel/demon analogs). In all, over a score of new paranormal powers are included; many could be easily
adapted for other *CORPS* campaigns. This section also details many advantages, disadvantages, and skills specific to
this setting.

A complete description of the campaign setting (38 pages) follows. Sections include a description of daily life in
conquered earth (life in some areas is grim indeed); technology (roughly equivalent to that of World War II Europe);
and geography, politics, and culture, including maps of each continent. Enough detail is provided that it should be
possible to start an *Apocalypse* campaign in any region.

Next is a set of twelve non-player characters (9 pages, all with illustrations). Most are fairly disturbed individuals (as
seems the norm in the world of *Apocalypse*), but all are interesting, if slightly stereotypical. Each includes several
adventure hooks, so getting them involved in most campaigns should not be a problem.

The creatures chapter follows (7 pages), and includes eleven unique creatures, again, all with illustrations. Most of
these are simply mutated or giant versions of normal animals, so they are rather ho-hum.

Two sample adventures (18 pages) are also included; these add one pre-generated PC, two additional creatures, and
two more NPCs. The first adventure is primarily investigatory, and is designed to introduce a single player, using the
pre-generated character provided, to the setting. The adventure could be retooled -- with some effort -- to introduce an

entire party of PCs to the setting. It's unclear why the author didn't choose to do just that, since it seems more likely that an entire party would need to be introduced to the setting rather than just a single PC. The second adventure is fairly linear, and is designed to be used by an entire party.

The book wraps up with five pages of useful charts including a list of weapons, miscellaneous equipment, four vehicle descriptions, and a character sheet, although the character sheet is just a duplicate of the one found in the *CORPS* rulebook.

The book is well written and organized, though an index would have been helpful. The .pdf version of the book helps in this regard with extensive hyperlinking. There are few typos or editing mistakes, adhering to BTRC's usual high standards of editing. Presentation of the material is good: the covers (front and back) are adequate, but not outstanding, and the interior artwork is actually very good, though there is one "adult-oriented" picture that seems gratuitous.

Apocalypse could easily provide the basis for an extended campaign or a set of one-shot adventures. It could be adapted with relative ease to other game systems; universal ones like *GURPS* or the *Hero System* could easily be adapted for use in an *Apocalypse* campaign if desired.

All in all, *Apocalypse* provides a good, but not incredible setting for *CORPS* campaigns. If you like the idea of mixing magic and modern technology with "dark" overtones, you should check out *Apocalypse*. The .pdf version is definitely a bargain at $8.50, especially if you have access to a good quality printer. I'm glad to see *CORPS* finally receiving some of the support it deserves, and I hope that future *CORPS* releases are even better than this one.

-- Andrew Byers

Who Wants To Live Forever?

"Verily, I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, until they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."
-- Matthew 16:28

But prior to the Second Coming, immortals race around lopping each others' heads off with katanas. Or ruling the world through compound interest. Or serving as moral lessons on the nature of Faith and Penitence. Or, most importantly, cropping up in roleplaying games. Herewith, then, a look at the most famous immortal in European legend, the Wandering Jew -- and, in the spirit of ecumenicism, a bunch of his aliases, avatars, and fellow-travelers. With their help (or opposition), he can turn up anywhere -- we already know immortals can turn up anywhen, of course. So follow the path back in time to 29 A.D., or at least to 1228, and let's get ready to ramble.

"Cartaphilus, a porter of the hall in Pilate's service, as Jesus was going out of the door, impiously struck Him on the back with his hand, and said in mockery, 'Go quicker, Jesus, go quicker; why do you tarry?' and Jesus, looking back on him with a severe countenance, said to him, 'I am going, and you shall tarry until I come again.'"
-- Matthew Paris, *Historia Major* (1256)

So, what's the deal with the Wandering Jew, then? First off, according to the 1228 *Chronicle of St. Albans,* his first-ever appearance in writing, he might very well be a Wandering Gentile; he's a Roman procurator's doorkeeper with a Greek name. (Also, of course, he's a tropical house-plant of the genus Tradescantia, but that's really pushing it, *Swamp Thing* parallels to one side.) And even if he was a Hellenized Jew, Matthew Paris goes on to quote the eminent "Bishop of Greater Armenia" as affirming that Cartaphilus was baptized by Ananias as "Joseph," which would make him a Wandering Christian. Confusing the issue even further, "Cartaphilus" means "most loved," which ties in with Jesus' implication (in John 21:22-23) that John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved," would also "tarry" until the Second Coming.

For a different kind of Wandering Gentile, he may also have been one of the legionaries (possibly named Lacedion) who scourged Christ before the crucifixion, or who diced for His clothing on Golgotha. Eventually, though, the most common version of the tale settled on a Jew, one Ahasuerus the shoemaker (and don't ask me what a Jew is doing with a variant of the Persian name Khsrish, since nobody knows) who mocked Christ when He paused near Ahasuerus' house carrying the cross. (Another Jewish potential Wanderer is the temple guardsman Malchus, whose ear Peter cut off at Gethsemane.) The Wandering Jew serves as an eyewitness to the historical truth, therefore, of the Gospel -- and the Wandering Jew's popularity in Protestant countries serves to contrast the Protestant doctrine of the "living Gospel" with the Catholic one of apostolic transmission. (One common element of the Wandering Jew story has Ahasuerus telling a skeptical Mohammed that he personally witnessed Christ's crucifixion, in contrast to Muslim belief that the Prophet Jesus was never executed.) Less pleasantly, some tales painted him as the rootless cosmopolitan vagrant of anti-Semitic legend -- not for nothing is one of the viler pieces of Nazi propaganda a film entitled *The Eternal Jew.* Mythology is a double-edged sword.

"Reviving, after a time, he siezed the hands of Agrippa, and said, 'Oh many and boundless thanks to you, learned Agrippa -- thou Prince of all the Magicians! I pray you receive this purse of costly jewels.' ... 'No! -- No!' exclaimed Cornelius Agrippa. 'Keep thy jewels, of whatever worth ... but tell me, I do implore thee, who thou art?'"
-- David Hoffman, *Chronicles of Cartaphilus, the Wandering Jew* (1853)

Thus as Cartaphilus, or Joseph, or Ahasuerus, or Malchus, the Wandering Jew began to appear in European tales and chronicles. In the earlier versions, he was mentioned as living in the [Mandevillian](#) East; in Greater Armenia, or with Prester John, or in Jerusalem. (In one version, he can't wander at all, and is condemned literally to tarry on the same spot in Jerusalem for all eternity.) The teller of the Jew's tale is often the "Armenian bishop," who bears a strong resemblance to another enigmatic well-traveled immortal, [le Comte de Saint-Germain](#). This tends to bolster the theory that the legend was imported from the Christian communities in the East around the time of the Crusades. An Italian legend of 'Giovanni Bottadio' (John God-Striker) shows up in Novara in 1267, and in Florence in 1415. In 1602, however, one 'Christoff Crutzer' of Leiden published *A Short Description and Hitory of A Jew Named Ahasuerus* as a

pamphlet describing the encounter of the Wandering Jew with the Lutheran bishop of Schleswig, Paul von Eitzen (sadly dead by 1598) in Hamburg in 1542. This began a whole series of reported sightings, both retroactive (most notably an encounter with Agrippa in Florence in 1525, but also in Madrid and Brussels in 1575 and Hamburg again in 1564) and current (Reval, Krakow, and Prague in 1602; Lübeck, Munich, and Paris in 1604). More than forty documented sightings followed, most notably by "a Turkish spy" in Paris (under the name of Paul Marrane) in 1644, in Stamford, England in 1658 (where he cured a man's tuberculosis), in Frankenstein (speaking of cursed wanderers) in 1678, Munich again in 1721, Brussels again in 1772 (under the name Isaac Lacquedem) and in London between 1818 and 1830.

"I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
The moment that his face I see
I know the man that must hear me;
To him my tale I teach."
-- Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*

By the 19th century, the Wandering Jew had gotten a makeover as the Gothic Wanderer Melmoth, still cursed by God, but far more romantic. The Byronic ethos of wandering rebellion played off the legend of Cain (cursed to roam the Earth) and Shelley's poem *Queen Mab* made the Wandering Jew the heroic embodiment of individualism. This, of course, fed off the Protestant conviction that the Wandering Jew's real role was to bear witness, which itself echoes the Jewish legend that the Prophet Elijah (or, in some versions, Enoch) wanders the world waiting to announce the coming of the Messiah.

Still more mythically, the Wandering Jew got tangled up with Herne the Wild Huntsman, who drives the devil's hounds across the sky (the legend this time naming him Hubert, and claiming that he refused Christ a drink from a trough, but told Him to drink from a hoofprint) and from thence to the Man in the Moon, exiled there for theft on the Sabbath outside the jurisdiction of Death. (The Moon, the Wild Hunt, and the Wandering Jew are all strongly correlated with storms.) A whole city outside Death's control, the City of Luz, shows up in some tales of legendary India -- but if an immortal leaves its gates, he dies instantly. Perhaps Luz is a suburb of Shangri-La, or the Lunar Embassy to Prester John. Mormon belief goes John "the beloved" two better with the story of the Three Nephites, who followed Christ on His ministry in America, and greeted Columbus on the beach. (There are people who identify Kulkulkan, Quetzalcoatl, and Viracocha as the Three Nephites, which is only slightly sillier than identifying them as Vikings, I suppose.) The Wandering Jew repaid the Mormons for their kindness by visiting Muddy Valley, Utah in 1870, the latest report of his appearance I've found.

" I am immortal and I am not alone."
-- Duncan MacLeod, opening narration, *Highlander: the Series* (first season)

Between all the various incarnations of the Wandering Jew, plus the Three Nephites, plus the Prophet Elijah, and Joseph of Arimathea (also identified as the "Joseph" baptized by Ananias, and kept immortal by the Holy Grail), and Cain, and Saint-Germain (and Flamel and Cagliostro and Münchausen, who share his legendary immortality), and Lazarus (whom a particularly unsavory legend insists that Christ brought back from the dead *permanently*), and Herod's wife Herodias (the Wandering Jew's girlfriend in many of the legends), and Marconi, there's a veritable plethora of immortals out there. But don't order yet, there's more Wandering Masters:

Aristeas

This legendary Greek poet (of the 9th, or 6th, century B.C.) wandered (both astrally and physically) through the lands of Hyperborea, Scythia, India, Aethiopia, and other realms of legend. He dropped dead in his home city of Proconnesus, but his body disappeared, only to reappear on the road to Cyzicus. Seven years later, he showed back up in Proconnesus and wrote an epic poem, the *Arimaspea,* about the land of the giants, only to vanish yet again. 340 years later still, he reappeared in Metapontum in Italy to insist that the locals erect a statue to him near Apollo's altar. He could still be wandering around as herald to Apollo, who may have granted him immortality.

Artephius

A famed Hermetic magician, Artephius wrote *De Vita Propaganda* (*On Propagating Life*) around 1150 at the age of 1,025. If he was actually the famed magus Apollonius of Tyana (as rumor has it), he was being modest by about a century. Like so many immortals, he used alchemy to prolong his existence.

Wei Po-Yang

A famous Taoist alchemist (fl. 142 A.D.) of the later Han dynasty, he tested his students by preparing a poison and killing a dog with it. He then took the poison himself, but only his loyal pupil Yu took the drug also. The rest left to report failure and prepare Wei Po-Yang's funeral, upon which Wei revived Yu and the dog with the True Medicine and departed for the West like the other Taoist immortals.

"But my choice and constant companions shall be a set of my own immortal brotherhood, among whom I would elect a dozen from the most ancient down to my own contemporaries. . . [We] would mutually communicate our observations and memorials through the course of time, remark the several gradations by which corruption steals into the world, and oppose it in every step, by giving perpetual warning and instruction to mankind . . ."
-- Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

Now that we've got the cast of characters straightened out, what's the story? Hey, what *isn't* the story? Immortals offer plenty of scope for roleplaying, both as guest stars and as player characters. So, until we get **GURPS Immortals**, here's a few possibilities. First, there's a legend that the Wandering Jew, the Flying Dutchman, and the Wild Huntsman meet once every century to revel in their wickedness -- which would make quite an **In Nomine** event, no doubt about it. Riffing on that, one could build a party of immortal PCs (including mayhap vampires, mummies, living statues, parrots, and what-have-you) meeting once a century to battle evil, or each other, or rival immortals -- and run from **GURPS Ice Age** to **GURPS New Sun** with it. Such a party (or its enemies) might be the nucleus of a secret society of **Illuminati**, which jealously (or prudently) guards the secret of immortality, whatever it is, like the Nine in Philip Jose Farmer's "Lord Grandrith" novels. The Elixir Vitae might lurk within **Warehouse 23**, or be accidentally re-invented by a white-coated Professor in **Atomic Horror** -- who (along with his lab assistants and their dog Sparky, with a nod to Wei Po-Yang) gets hurled into the Time War of The Immortal Masters! Who themselves, of course, might have been [alien Nordics](), or their genetically-engineered superhuman agents, all along. Against the Immortal Space-Demon Nazi Reptoids, then, our only hope is the primordial technomagic of the Seal of Solomon, abstracted from the ruined Temple by one Ahasuerus -- the Wandering Jew, who by continuing to live holds off the end of the world. L'chaim! To life!

Playing Dirty -- Chick Style

Ah, summertime. The smell of flowers wafts through the early evening air. It is the time of shorts, barbecues, swimming pools, and. . . gaming conventions. Gamers of all shapes and sizes come out of their dark lairs, sniff the fresh air, and trundle instinctively across vast distances toward their sacred, hotel-shaped gathering places. They travel in their cramped vehicles, smelling of stale Doritos and old sweat, driven by a deep internal force to gather in bizarre rituals involving weird invocations over arcane tomes and strange pieces of plastic loosely called "dice."

Why do they come? Why do these strange creatures venture out of their dens into the harsh sunlight? They're looking to meet new people, have wacky con adventures and seek out the holiest of gaming rituals: the one shot. Sometimes, in the midst of feverishly practicing this ritual, the gamer suddenly looks up over the table and sees someone almost but not quite entirely un-gamer-shaped. After getting over the initial shock, complete with the heart palpitations and the sweaty palms, he embraces this new situation, and he thinks, "But. . . she might. . . she might. . . be a gamer. . . "

The woman gamer, after making the same pilgrimage across the same obscene distances to have the same convention experiences, is looking at her character sheet and thinking, "Man, I'm the cleric *again*?." At the same time, she's cognizant that the guy across the table is thinking romantic thoughts about her and the food court pizza. Maybe even at the same time.

Never fear! While the pizza might be a greasy yet unavoidable reality, playing the typecast female character written down on the lowly character sheet is not. Ladies, here is a chance that shouldn't be passed up, since the one shot doesn't come every day! It's a blessing in disguise -- or at least in a chainmail bikini. It's time to let loose, get crazy, and give the GM and the players a run for their money. Who says that girls always play nice and obsess about story, story, story?

Who says girls can't play just as dirty as the boys?

The following are some hints on fun things to try during a game to make it an entertaining experience for everyone. The USDA does not recommend using (or abusing) the advice during a normal daily campaign. It can be hazardous to your health, have been shown to cause cancer to gerbils, and are the leading source of alien abductions. You've been warned.

Show Your Destructive Side

The story is very important. You're almost positive there is one, and it has something to do with the game you're playing. But how badly do you want to hear yet another sob story about a creature that is menacing the town, or another deep moral dilemma to be solved? Haven't you played this before? Do you really care?

There's a reason your character has a big sword strapped to her back, and it's not because it matches her earrings. It's time to kill some monsters and loot some dungeons. Don't be afraid to hire retainers to help carry the treasure out to the nearby towns. And if some of them die in the process, that's okay -- they're just retainers. They're kind of like popcorn, but chewier.

Argue about the rules! Maximize your killing potential! Take no prisoners -- literally! Trash the dungeon, loot the castle, and kill all the small crunchy monsters in your way. Hey, if the guys can go through a scenario and cleave everything that moves, so can you.

Buddy Up With the Villain

Sure he's big. He probably has big, mossy green teeth. You really should be afraid of him, and you're trying. Really, you're trying. But even the giant gooey slime monster could use a little bit of advice from the most practically minded

member of the party, especially if he's trying to take over the world. After all, the bad guy has a decent stronghold, legions of followers, and large caches of weapons. Otherwise, he wouldn't be the bad guy, and wouldn't be worth being killed by anyone, let alone a group of adventuring heroes.

But once in a while, it's hard not to see both sides of an argument. If this guy has all these followers, how bad could he really be? Maybe it's just a bad PR job! Maybe he had a bad childhood! Maybe he just needs some love! So he's killed a few people, so what. How many of his people has your adventuring group killed? Just as many!

Get your adventuring group to get them to see both sides of the story. Convince them to join the villain in trashing the local towns. Help him build dungeons designed to kill other wandering parties of adventurers. Offer advice for a better set of traps. Learn to love black leather.

Uses for a 7" Stiletto Heel

Ever wonder why fantasy art depicts women wearing towering, 7" stiletto heels? Think it has something to do with sex appeal? Think again! The stiletto heel is an amazing invention. It's not just a shoe; it's a handy-dandy, multi-purpose tool. Clearly, women invented it for women -- and not just as a torture device. Don't let your heroine be without them!

Think about the following: if you suddenly need to build a shelf, you don't need to go into town to get a hammer. The point of the heel is conveniently nail-sized. And if one heel breaks, you have another to replace it. Convenience! Or, what if you need to pry open a door, and are in search of a quick pry bar? Why, here's this seven-inch lever right here on your foot. Just shove into opening, pull, and voila!

And that's not all. For just $20 at Payless ShoeSource, you can make sure that you're never completely unarmed. It's amazing what a good heel to the head will do. That sucker will go right through the skull if hit at the right angle. Heck, if you're playing *Rolemaster*, there might even be a chart for it.

If you really want the guys to cringe, when in battle, go it hand-to-hand. Ask the GM for the hit location chart. Ask if you can do a called shot. Grin. Ask if it does extra damage.

Accessorize With Those Heels!

It's not just heels that are incredibly useful. It's the entire outfit. It's amazing what a creative player can hide in her bodice. And who is going to search a proper woman's bodice? Certainly no chivalrous man! You could outfit an entire army in those skirts.

The overly complicated and uncomfortable underwear the female character is forced to endure is both a curse and a blessing. While it might be itchy and confining, a woman can be literally bristling with weapons, complete with guns down the brassiere, knives in the garter, and poisons in the jewelry. And those articles of clothing are multi-purpose.

The garter can turn into an instant sling for those times when the woman is lost in the woods and needs a sling to kill a rabbit for dinner. It can also be used to stealthily toss rocks at guards to distract, annoy, and bean them on the head.

Hosiery can be used as a mask in pulling a heist, a rope to dangle from as one crosses between buildings on a tether during a daring escape, a garrote for killing political prisoners, and an emergency fan belt in a car engine.

The brassiere is convenient for smuggling documents and weapons while providing plenty of support during a hard day of adventuring. It can be used to hold water from a cool stream, or piles of hors d'oeuvres while sneaking out of a state dinner. Make sure it's well padded! No one wants her (or his!) chain bikini top to pinch.

Say Just the Right Thing

A woman's offhand comment can be as deadly as any weapon or magic spell, and used with just as devastating an

effect. Sometimes, it can be more so. A little bit of charm, a well-placed quip, and the men will be on their knees. It just takes a little bit of fast thinking. Here are some hints:

- **Go for the ego.** As the well-oiled warrior puffs himself up and exclaims with much pomp and circumstance, "I am Mustafa of Hokkaido Prefecture, son in the long line of great warrior-chefs, grandson to the head pastry chef of the Emperor," yawn and file your fingernails. Look bored. Tell him you've been to Hokkaido. Explain that you don't care for dainty spices.
- **Go for the bravado.** When faced with a particularly nasty and evil menace, listen closely as he reveals his master plan to take over the world. When he's done, offer some advice to improve it. Smile. Tell him that it's a very nice master plan, and you're very proud that he could think it up all by himself.
- **Go for the equipment.** Look over your weapon sheet. Explain how you really like the little knife you've been given, because it's very good for flaying skin without injuring the organs underneath. Say how easy it is to extract a confession from a prisoner using just this knife. Mention how, on consideration, you think it would work well combined with a red-hot poker. Ask if anyone is carrying a poker in his or her inventory, and if so, ask if they will trade with you.

Imaginative Body Decorations!

A few imaginative body decorations can really spice up any gaming event. A good tattoo, even temporary ones, can be an endless font of fascination and disturbing visual imagery for the session. Why stop at making elaborate costumes and carrying around swords, when you can go one step further and alter your appearance just enough to leave a permanent impression? Everyone is doing the Renaissance, and there's no reason why you shouldn't, too.

Get a temporary tattoo of a spider around your right eye. When asked, tell people you serve Lloth. Say you heard about Lloth at a local feminist gathering, and it sounded good to you. Mention offhand that you think the blood sacrifice of the men is a pretty good idea. Tell them that where you're from, everyone is doing it. Ask them if they want to play *D&D*.

Give your character fangs. Better yet, wear fangs yourself to the gaming session. Grin at the other players. Gain special style points for wearing them to *Werewolf*.

Now, these are just a few hints to get you going in the right direction. Remember: these are just for fun. Overuse can lead to armed mobs, rioting in the streets, being banned from Napster, and sudden indulgence in an unlimited number of pixie sticks. And we all know what kind of havoc gamers under the influence of pixie sticks can cause. Right. Say it with me now: "Horrors beyond imagining." Think before you act, and remember the children.

If you do choose to use these suggestions in your normal weekly campaign, remind your GM to breathe slowly and imagine his happy place. Remember: when you're at a convention, you can run and hide. But when you game with your friends, they know where you live. And if you get abducted by aliens, well, you were warned.

*(Emily Dresner claims that she would **never** try any of these things. She's a dedicated story-oriented roleplayer who would never stoop to childish pranks. Honestly.*

Special thanks to Genevieve Cogman, Jo Hart and Beth McCoy for the inspiration, hints, and ideas.)

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Considering the "Ick" in Dynamic

I was sitting in one of my favorite restaurants, enjoying a plate of ribs alfredo while desperately trying to think about the column on dynamic campaign worlds my headachy brain promised last week, when the answer hit me.

Static campaign worlds defy realism.

I realized this thinking about one of the longest campaigns I've been in to date: A *Vampire: The Dark Ages* campaign set in Wales that ran from about 850 AD to 1348 AD. And in that time, which many folks think of as a relatively static period of history, there were incredible, world-shaking (or at least country-shaking) changes occurring almost constantly. Antipopes. A mini ice age. Vikings. Norman invasions. Wars between Wales and England. Crusades. England at war with France. England booted out of the church. Mongol hordes in Europe. Dick Clark born. Plagues.

Admittedly 500 years is a pretty wide swathe to draw events from, but I hope the general point isn't lost: history is constantly happening. The world is always changing, whether we want it to or not.

Compare the world of 1990 with the world of 2000: A failed hard-line coup in Russia. The reunification of Germany. U.S. military actions against Iraq. NATO and UN actions in Europe. Worldwide economic recessions; U.S. economic growth. Human genome project; widespread DNA testing. Cloning. Global warming. Antibiotic-resistant bacteria. The dawn of the information age. Y2K fears.

Given how different the world of 1990 is from the world of 2000, how realistic is it to presume that a game world that came out in 1990 should be the same in 2000?

Dynamic game worlds give players and GMs a chance to have fun in a world that, while different from our own, will progress and evolve like a real world would (or could). A real world is going to evolve and change, regardless of the players actions (or inaction); sometimes the world changes because of one person's (or a group of people's) actions, but not very often. And, frankly, even in a cinematic world, the PCs aren't always going to be the most important people in the world.

Let's take *Star Trek VI* (and, yeah, there's a spoiler, but it's nothing you can't glean from the trailer). Kirk and the gang, having saved the world a few jillion times, have nothing to do with the Klingons attempting to sue for peace. No, that initiative comes from one of their moons blowing up. It's a big deal, and has nothing to do with the PCs.

A dynamic world gives new experiences and ideas for players (and GMs) to react to. One of the highlights (as a player) in the Dark Ages campaign I mentioned was the beginning session "state of the world" announcements: "Okay; it's 1101. Word gets to you that England has a new king, Henry I, you hear about a civil war in Bohemia, and a radical new device has been introduced to Europe. . . it's called the 'fork.'" In addition to creating ideas for plot threads for adventures, these announcements gave characters a chance to make their thoughts known on topics, and provide new elements to drop into conversations: "This plan of yours is as ludicrous and ungodly as. . . the fork!"

Many GMs have a problem with game worlds telling them how their worlds should evolve. But, in honesty, I'm not sure how much choice game companies have. If you were to ask ten GMs to advance our own world by ten years, you'd probably end up with ten different visions. By having a communal universe for gamers to experience, you can be sure that everyone's "on the same page;" the Grand Interstellar War started at the same time for everyone, the Betrayal of Fuzzykins was initiated by the same sinister organization, the Plague Magique started in the same secluded province and spread like wildfire.

Now, over in the chat rooms, I talked about this very topic with a few folks, and they had some interesting points:

- "Metaplot" worlds sometimes seem like writers who'd rather write about their kewl NPCs than write a novel.
- Dynamic worlds make it difficult to create meaningful stories, since the actions of the PCs can be overshadowed by the actions of off-screen NPCs.

- Dynamic worlds don't provide support in case the world deviates substantially from the "official" world.
- The metaplots of dynamic worlds don't allow for possibilities of player involvement.

Let's look at this one by one:

"Metaplot" worlds sometimes seem like writers who'd rather write about their kewl NPCs than write a novel.

To be honest, so does history, sometimes. Objectively read, the history of 1980's America feels a *lot* like someone who really liked Ronald Reagan, and wanted to give lots of chances for him to be a kewl NPC. The actions of William Wallace seem larger than life, and feel like a writer striving to give him a chance to shine. And, really, is there much difference between:

"Seeking to bring about Ragnarok, Methuselah Bobo calls a Blood Feud against Tribal Elder Chim-Chim, betraying an ancient pact and bringing vampyres and werewoofs into conflict in Chicago."

and

"Seeking land and global might, Adolf Hitler invades Poland, breaking a treaty and provoking Neville Chamberlain and Édouard Daladier into declaring war, ultimately bringing all of Europe into war."

Dynamic worlds make it difficult to create meaningful stories, since the actions of the PCs can be overshadowed by the actions of off-screen NPCs.

Well, using World War II as a prolonged example, are the stories of *Indiana Jones & the Last Crusade*, *The English Patient*, and *Casablanca* somehow less meaningful because of the actions of Hitler, Churchill, FDR and Stalin? Would those stories have worked in static "non-WWII" universes? Just because there's a Plague Magique doesn't mean that every story about the Plague Magique needs to revolve around people dying of it or people finding a cure for it.

Dynamic worlds don't provide support in case the world deviates substantially from the "official" world.

Well, neither do static worlds. If, as a GM, you run a ***Paranoia*** campaign where the clones finally blow up The Computer, you're on your own about that. Likewise, "what happens next" is just as problematic for a campaign world that stops the Plague Magique as a Cliffhanger world where the PCs sneak into Hitler's bunker and shoot him. . . there *is* no ***Hitler Done Got Blowed Up*** sourcebook. (As an aside, hats off to White Wolf for its ***Aberrant: Year One*** adventure book, where significant sidebars are devoted to what happens if the events of the adventures don't work out like they do in "official" continuity.)

The metaplots of dynamic worlds don't allow for possibilities of player involvement.

Again, that depends. Not every WWII story needs to be *Saving Private Ryan*. But given the lack of popularity (or, more correctly, marketability) of adventures nowadays, today's dynamic worlds don't hold the hands of GMs who wish to involve the players.

In that ***Dark Ages*** campaign, the source material said that one of the Vampiric Clans would be put on trial in 1199. So guess which PC group brought the charges, served as witnesses, and brought about that history (and endured the consequences)? While certainly not all metaplots can have direct player involvement, just because a metaplot doesn't specifically say, "A band of adventurers brought word to Tribal Elder Chim-Chim about the impending conflict in Chicago" doesn't mean it couldn't happen that way. Likewise, in *Star Trek VI*, even though the Enterprise don't have *direct* involvement in the Klingon peace accord, they still have important front row seats throughout the entire thing.

Okay; having said all that, I will point out that dynamic worlds definitely have their share of problems. For one thing, they're easy to mess up; in games, like in novels, players (and readers) will trust creators up to a point, and then no more. One ill-advised development, twist, or metaplot can bring the whole thing crashing down. *Highlander* and its premise were popular; *Highlander 2* and its sci-fi revelations left many fans of *Highlander* wincing. When DC Comics killed Superman, they were met with great success; when Marvel revealed Spider-Man was a clone, they were met with torch-wielding peasants.

In addition, it takes good creators to pull off "realistic" dynamic worlds. One of my troubles with the modern ***Vampire*** game is that, after five hundred years or so of nothing-terribly-interesting happening in vampiric society, about six earth-shaking things have occurred in the past six years. Likewise, as dynamic as the 1990's may have been, they were still believable and organic; President Clinton did not once turn into MegaClinton, all left-handed people did not suddenly burst into flames, and it has yet to be revealed that televisions are sentient aliens intent on conquering the earth. While a good creator can take an unlikely premise like a time-travelling phone booth and make it believable, a lesser creator can take something as natural as an international conflict and make it seem forced, unrealistic, and lame. Fortunately, there's nothing that says you *have* to use a plot thread presented by a game company.

Dynamic worlds have the problem of accessibility; I know that the idea of trying to jump into, say, ***Deadlands*** is daunting to some folks, since there's been a few years of story, development, and plot, and many people are afraid they won't understand what's going on. White Wolf has done a good job of making new editions relatively self-standing; ironically, though, this can create other problems -- many fans of ***Mage 1st Edition*** are perplexed and disgruntled with the campaign world as presented in ***2nd Edition Revised***.

Finally, in a timed campaign world, it's very easy to outrun your source material. The "official" ***Dark Ages*** game begins in 1196; even starting in 850 AD we outran most of the established plots pretty quickly. ***Fading Suns*** is set in 4999 AD (as of ***2nd Edition***), with rumors that something big may (or may not) happen in the year 5000 AD. Unfortunately, our gaming group quickly outran the source material, and it's now March of 5000. We're just hoping we don't "remember" something big that happened a few months ago when new source material comes out. . .

Done correctly, a dynamic campaign world can feel as rich and exciting as any "real" history. Done poorly, it can feel like a Discordian three-ring circus, burning tents and rampaging elephants overshadowing any players' attempts to feel important.

So which do I prefer? As I said last week, I like both. I think there's a place for the never-ending timeless battle against the *(begin ominous "look behind you!" music)* evil cultists *(end ominous music)*, and a place for a super-hero world that realistically introduces metahumans tomorrow and attempts to logically build a dynamic world from that.

But looking at which games sell the most, it seems that a lot of folks are willing to support creators' ideas of dynamic universes. . . until they mess it up.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Talisman City*** (1989 edition)

(Four stars) And when it begins to move its antennae and swivel its optical telescopes, I know that it is seeing the whole great universe for the first time, and I know it is alive. And I am proud of it.

by Justin Bacon

Art by Dan Smith

All roleplaying systems have a method of resolving action. Most use dice to check against a numerical value in one fashion or another to determine the success or failure of those actions. Few systems, however, provide any framework for interpreting those successes and failures.

This lack is surprising. The roleplaying experience relies entirely on the ability of the Game Master and players to communicate the reality of a fictional world and the characters therein as believably as possible. The real world, and the vast majority of worlds of fiction, do not exist in a binary fashion -- when Conan swings his sword he does not "hit" or "miss," he "swings his mighty blade and with thews of steel crushes the skull of his hapless captor" or "brings his sword about in a massive sweep, narrowly missing his hastily retreating opponent."

Yet, beyond some mumbling of how a "higher margin of success means the character has had a greater success than if he had succeeded by a slimmer margin," roleplaying systems on the whole do not provide any intuitive clues for the GM to describe the outcome of a resolved action to his players.

This article attempts to rectify this lack by providing a meta-system -- a system which can be applied to many different systems. In this case, any system which uses more than a single die for action resolution. It is not an attempt to "lock" GMs or players into an unalterable scheme of description, however. The system is designed to provide more than the crudest outlines of exactly how success was achieved, but it attempts to supplement, not usurp, the creativity of the play group.

Overview

Before looking into what this new system consists of, let us first look at what is provided by the action resolution systems typically found in most current games.

Any action resolution mechanic must provide, at a minimum, two degrees: a success and a failure for any action attempted under its auspices. Many of these systems, whether they acknowledge it or not, also contain a simple evaluation of how "well" or "badly" the success or failure of the action was. This takes the form of a "margin of success" or a "margin of failure." In short, the greater the difference between the number you wanted to roll and the number you did roll the better the success or the worse the failure. If, for example, you needed to roll at least a 10 on 3d6 to succeed and you roll a 16, the GM would conclude that your character easily succeeded at what he was attempting to do. On the other hand, if you rolled exactly a 10, he

might make your success much more slim -- instead of clearing the
canyon with room to spare, the character's foot hits right on the edge
and he teeters for a moment on the edge of balance before, finally,
stumbling forward.

And this is where the vast majority of resolution systems stop -- which is good in itself, but incredibly limiting. The GM is left with a vast void to fill in describing the outcome of actions. When confronted with a system which doesn't even possess a margin of success, the GM is left with the arduous task of attempting to reconstruct a Picasso painting from a black and white sketch -- and even with a margin of success you've barely established a grayscale.

What's missing? In short, the GM knows that you succeeded or failed -- and the margin by which you did so -- but *why* did you succeed or fail? What form did that success or failure take? If you succeeded exceptionally, why? If you failed marginally, why? Should a marginal failure ever be catastrophic? Marginal success be akin to slight failure?

The system proposed in this article fixes these problems by giving the GM a wider grasp of what effects lead to the success or failure of the PC. Beyond the simple margin of success involved, implementing this system will tell the GM a great deal of information on any number of topics on which he wishes to seek more guidance: How much time was required to accomplish the action? Was it bad luck or a lack of skill that caused a failure? Even a simple hit location system is provided for games without them -- without adding a single die roll!

The only proviso to this system is that the resolution mechanic of the system in question must use more than one die. A GM using a percentile system should use 2d10 for percentile dice (instead of a single d100). A GM using a single die system will not be able to use the system found in this article without modification to his resolution mechanic. GM's whose resolution mechanic uses different types of dice (a d20 and a d6 together, for example) may also need to make a few modifications to the system in this article before it functions smoothly.

In short, each die roll is assigned a different quality. To keep track of the different dice, each die should be a different color or have some other form of easy identification mark. Making the decisions after rolling about which die represents which quality doesn't help the GM at all.

After assigning desired qualities to the dice of his resolution mechanic, the GM then analyzes each roll. The die which is "best" (for success) or "worst" (for failure) had the most influence on the outcome.

For example, if the die which has been assigned the quality of "Time Required" is rolled with the best result, then the action took very little time. If, on the other hand, it was a comparatively poor result, then the action took more time. Quickly might be "an hour" for fixing a car, of course, and a long amount of time might only amount to a couple of minutes instead of a few seconds when picking a lock.

The GM should never feel bound to the results of the dice in describing what happened, nor should the players attempt to point to this system and "force" desired outcomes. The system is designed to be a guideline to feed the creative

impulses, not a straitjacket to strangle them with.

Qualities

Time Required. This quality is used to determine the amount of time an action takes to complete. For example, a good roll on this die will indicate that the action took less time for the character to perform. A bad roll on this die will indicate that the action took more time. Of course, the exact amount of time in question is a factor of what type of action is taking place.

Outside Influences. This quality is used to determine whether or not outside influences (i.e., things beyond the character's control and/or experience) had the greatest or least effect on the outcome.
Example: A character is attempting to pick a lock and succeeds, rolling very high on the outside influences die. The GM says, "Well, some day you're hoping you'll run into a challenge -- but this isn't it. A clear example of why government contractors should never be hired, the lock clicks open almost immediately." If, on the other hand, he had had a marginal failure and rolled poorly on the outside influences die, the GM might have said, "Although you do your best, this lock is tough. Clearly a custom-made job, the tumblers have disguised trips and keep slipping off your pick. You might be able to crack it eventually, but you'll have to start over from ground zero."

Knowledge. The knowledge quality addresses that little memory bank everyone carries around with them -- high influence from the knowledge die would suggest that either the character possesses some little piece of knowledge that makes the difference (success) or lacks a piece of knowledge that would help them (failure).
Example: To return to our lockpicking example, above, a character succeeds with the knowledge die having the largest effect on that outcome. The GM might say, "Normally this lock would have been more than adequate security for this type of facility, but you just spent three weeks practicing on a lock off the same assembly line. Within seconds the door swings open."

Skill. This one is probably one of the most obvious of the qualities -- it refers to the skill of the character and the impact it had on the outcome. If the skill roll was highly beneficial, it means that the character was performing at the best of his ability (even if he still subsequently failed). If the skill roll was extremely poor, it indicates that the character wasn't doing his best (even if he proceeded to succeed at the action).
Example: Rozel, a character involved in a fencing match attempts to strike his opponent, Benalt, and manages to succeed, although his skill roll is rather low. The GM shakes his head, "Rozel feints to the left and manages to draw Benalt's block, but then doesn't come back far enough to right. Only because Benalt's foot slips does your blade manage to slash across his arm." On the other hand, if the skill die had been higher, the GM might have said, "Rozel feints expertly to the left and Benalt moves to respond, only to be caught completely off-guard as the tip of your saber loops under his blade and tears a bloody gash into his arm."

Luck. Sometimes the biggest reason a character succeeds is because he has gotten lucky. If the most influential die result turns out to be on the luck die the GM should have the resolution of the action come about because of something completely out of the character's control.
Example: In a science fiction game, Laatzu, a fighter pilot, is attempting to blast one of the evil Bengai's out of known space with his lasers. He fails, largely due to the poor roll on the die assigned the luck quality. "Laatzu loops his ship in behind the Bengai Tiger Scout and lets loose two searing bolts of death . . . only to meet with disappointment as his expertly placed shots strike an unnoticed piece of space debris."

Style. Unlike the qualities discussed so far, the style quality doesn't attempt to shed light on how or why something succeeded or failed -- but how the success or failure took place. It asks the question, "Just how good did that look?"
Example: Billy the Gangster attempts to leap over a stack of boxes, coming out of a rolling somersault, and fire two shots at some anonymous mug taking shots at his pals on the other side of the warehouse. He rolls a success, despite the abysmal result on the die assigned to style. The GM smirks, "Billy takes a couple of loping steps and leaps over the stack of boxes . . . knocking the top two over, stumbling, and falling flat on his back. His pistol slips out of his hand as he lands and skitters across the floor, sending him after it in a wild crawl. Snapping it up he manages to squeeze off a couple of shots and fill the mug full of lead just before he gets a face full of lead from the shotgun pointed at his head." On the other hand, Sarah, an acrobat, is trying to walk across a beam. Her action resolution roll is a failure, but

her style die is high. "Sarah is crossing the beam when suddenly she feels her balance slip. As she falls off she pushes a little bit with her leg and manages to land gracefully on the floor after a flip instead of falling flat on her butt."

Power. Sometimes people succeed just because they put more power into the attempt, or fail because they didn't. This quality is particularly useful in combat situations.
Example: Conan attacks an NPC with his sword and rolls a success with a particularly beneficial result on his power die. The GM grimaces, "Conan brings his mighty blade around. Although the guard raises his sword to parry it is completely ineffectual as your mighty arms push his blade out of the way and crush his skull." Alternatively, you might have Gabrielle, a thief with an attitude, throw her dagger at a hapless orc, failing to do any damage with a particularly ineffectual score on her power die. "Your graceful throw is perfectly accurate, but glances ineffectually off the hard leather encircling the orc's chest."

Finesse. This quality reflects on the precision with which a given action was taken, and its impact on success. For example, a poor roll on this die would show clumsiness, while a positive roll on this die would grace and perfection.
Example: The Wizard, a hacker in a *Cyberpunk* game, is trying to get past some Black ICE which is preventing him from reading the data files he needs to reveal a corporation's corruption. Rolling a marginal failure on attack he has a particularly poor result on his finesse die. "Getting a little overconfident, huh?" says the Game Master. "The ICE swallows those simple macros with ease. You're going to have to have to bring out the big guns if you expect to get past this guy." Later on he gets a stunning success with a high finesse roll, "Nice work. That blackie was pretty effective, and usually your progs would have had some problems, but by slipping past his I/O channels and hitting his processor directly you take him out, smiling in satisfaction as his data-scream of death reverberates through your skull."

Hit Location. Using a system similar to that described above for qualities, a simple hit location system can be added to any multi-dice combat resolution (although it probably means removing the normal qualities from combat resolution).

Possible Combinations	
2 dice	Head/Torso, Limbs
3 dice	Head, Torso, Limbs
3 dice	Head/Torso, Arms, Legs
4 dice	Head, Torso, Arms, Legs
5 dice	Head/Torso, Left Arm, Right Arm, Left Leg, Right Leg

Essentially you assign to each die in the resolution a different hit location. In the case of a successful attack, whichever die was most influential on the outcome (usually the highest roll, although in some systems the lowest) is the location of the hit.

This system, like most hit location systems, works best for humanoid creatures -- although it can be easily adapted to non-humanoids.

Although the examples list different possibilities based on the number of dice typically used in the resolution, it's just as easy to show the likelihood of hitting each location by -- for example -- having a single die for "head" and two dice each for "torso" and "limbs."

If the GM wishes to add damage bonuses based on this hit location system he may, or he can simply use it as a descriptive aid like the other qualities.

Examples of Application

This system is incredibly easy to implement and use, but it does require the GM to make a few up-front choices about what he wants in the way of help. No resolution system to my knowledge uses exactly eight dice for action resolution -- and even if they do a GM will easily find himself getting continually confused about which die represents which quality ("Green… green is… err… ahhh…") which removes the whole advantage of having the system in place. So the question becomes which qualities the GM thinks will serve his campaign best, and will help him the most.

To help towards that end, here are a few examples of putting the system into effect using existing systems on the market.

Feng Shui

Feng Shui, the game of Hong Kong Action movies, uses a resolution mechanic of rolling 2d6 -- one positive, one negative -- to get an action total. A GM decides that the two most appropriate qualities for this type of game would be Style and Luck and he assigns one to each die. He further decides that due to the peculiarity of the system he'll let his players choose which die (positive or negative) will represent Style and Luck before each roll.

Example of Use: Marcia, a Karate Cop, has her back against a wall in an underground garage as some big bruiser blasts holes out of the concrete from around the corner. She decides the concrete's taken enough punishment for her sake, and tries to roll out from behind her cover and plant a few big holes in the guy taking potshots at her. She easily succeeds, with a low roll on Luck (which she chose to put on her negative die) and a high roll on Style (which she chose to put on her positive die). Rolling out from behind her cover perfectly she catches the muscle-bound clod completely unawares as her .45 takes out some important sections of his chest, "twirling the gun around her finger as she pulls off each shot."

GURPS

A GM designing a fantasy campaign decides to use *GURPS* from Steve Jackson Games with its 3d6 resolution mechanic as his game system of choice. Knowing his own weaknesses in description (he usually found himself focusing on how skilled the action was and little else) he decides to emphasize some other areas, choosing the qualities of Time Required, Outside Influences, and Knowledge for his three dice.

Example of Use: Dreyldor, a lithe female elf with a body to kill for, decides to try seducing the king for her own sinister purposes while the Queen is out of town. She fails, rolling high on her Knowledge die, but low on her Time Required and Outside Influences dice. "You've worked on kings before and know exactly what a man like this is feeling," the GM says, "But it simply takes you too much time. On the day before the Queen is to return he lets you steal a kiss, but nothing more, and once she returns you have no hope of succeeding."

Champions (Power, Finesse, Style)

Champions, the premiere game of superhero roleplaying, uses a 3d6 mechanic. A GM running this system decides that he'll choose the qualities of Power, Finesse, and Style because he feels the combination will bring about good descriptions for a superhero campaign.

Example of Use: An asteroid is flying towards a doomed Earth. Chuck decides he wants his character, the Living Reactor, to stop it by flying up and pushing it out of the way. He rolls a mediocre Style die, a poor Power die, and a great Finesse die -- succeeding. The GM smiles, "The Living Reactor launches himself into space and straight towards the asteroid, but the asteroid's mass is just too much and it continues on inexorably. You think for a moment and then remember something about vector mathematics from high school physics -- you were studying it just before your homemade reactor blew up in your basement, giving you amazing powers beyond the ken of mortal man, but I digress . . . You're not able to stop the meteor, but you are able to alter its course so that it will harmlessly pass by the Earth."

FUDGE (Outside Influences, Skill, Knowledge, Luck)

FUDGE, the *Freeform Universal Do-it-yourself Game Engine*, designed by Steffan O'Sullivan and published by Grey Ghost Games, uses an interesting mechanic of 4dF ("F" for Fudge Dice) which is functionally equivalent to 4d3-8. One GM using the system for science fiction decides to take advantage of this large number of dice to have a more holistic selection of qualities -- Outside Influences, Skill, Knowledge, and Luck.

Example of Use: Rawthlar, a ferocious cat-creature from the planet of Purrtend, whips out his blaster and tries to blow a few holes in an offensive Lizardman from the planet Hisstery as the ship they're in begins to fall apart. He fails despite his decent rolls on the skill and knowledge dice due to a poor showing on his luck and outside influences dice. The GM describes his attempts as such: "Rawthlar, although being one of the better shots this side of the Andromeda

Cluster, has the unfortunate luck to be standing on a deckplate as it suddenly lurches to one side. Your shot goes wild and the Lizardman hisses in grim pleasure."

Example of Use: Later, after dispatching of the Lizardman through other means, Rawthlar commandeers a shuttle and is now attempting to pilot it out of the shuttlebay before the spaceship blows itself to pieces. The GM requests a roll against his piloting skill and gets back a success with great results on the luck die and the skill die. "As the shuttle lifts slowly off the pad the support beams of the shuttlebay begin to collapse. You bring the engines on-line in a horrible, mechanical growl and the shuttle speeds forward. Doing an amazing roll to avoid being crushed by one of the heavy beams you bring the shuttle out through the bay doors just as the bay collapses behind you. Seconds later a horrendous explosion consumes the remnants of the dying ship. You made it out just in time."

FUDGE (Style, Skill)

Another GM using *FUDGE* for horror decides he doesn't want to juggle that many qualities, so he only uses two -- style and skill -- assigning two dice to each.

Example of Use: Benedict, a Catholic priest with an edge, has been cornered by undead hordes in the basement of the old mansion. His player, Joe, decides that escape is now the better part of valor and says, "Benedict pushes over the stack of dusty crates into the path of the zombies, simultaneously dropping a grenade at his feet, smashing the sunken window behind him and crawling out as quickly possible." The GM rolls his eyes, "Only trying three things at once tonight, Joe? Sure you wouldn't like to try three dozen? Roll against your Dex, plus triple action penalties for the round." Much to the GM's discomfort Joe is as lucky tonight with the dice as always, rolling his two style dice exceptionally well, one of his skill dice fairly well and the other with average results. "Not bad, huh?" Joe chuckles. The GM rolls his eyes, "As the zombies close in, dripping ichor, Benedict drops to a crouch, performs a perfect spin-kick on the stack of boxes, knocking them into the first line of zombies who promptly fall over. Without a second glance he finishes the spin, simultaneously loosening one of the grenades on his belt, removing the pin, and letting it drop. No sooner has it hit the ground then he springs up through the window, smashing it, and coming out on the grassy lawn in a perfectly committed somersault. Coming to his feet and into a run he easily gives himself plenty of distance before the basement becomes a raging inferno behind him."

Adaptations

There are a number of simple modifications and adaptations of the basic concept found in this system. The Hit Locations system described earlier is one possibility. This section of the article will try to point out a few more of these -- even if complete mechanics for each of the adaptations is occasionally left up to the GM's discretion, creativity, and personal needs.

Resolution Methods

Many games have different resolution systems depending on what type of action is being attempted or the circumstances under which the attempt is made. The most obvious and common of these is the distinction made between "normal" skill resolution and "combat" skill resolution.

Even when the two systems of resolution are practically or entirely identical in game terms the descriptive needs of the GM may alter drastically between, for example, combat and non-combat situations. The simplest adaptation of the systems in this article is to simply use different qualities at different times.

For example, a GM may feel that in non-combat situations he will be most aided by the qualities of Time Required, Outside Influences, and Finesse. On the other hand he might find Skill, Style, and Luck to be more useful for combat situations.

This modification is as easy as simply using those qualities at those times in which you will feel they will be most useful.

Damage

Many systems on the market today continue to follow the example of **D&D** and use a separate dice roll to determine the damage done by a weapon. In several cases multiple dice are used and it therefore becomes easy to create a list of "damage qualities" which would help you describe not only the severity of damage, but the type of damage done.

Character Schticks

Not all characters are the same -- and in several genres (particularly the pulp and superhero ones) each "type" of character is possessed of a very distinct, personal style. Superman, for example, behaves and operates in one manner, while Batman behaves and operates in a quite different manner. This system can be easily adapted to such situations.

Instead of having one set of universal qualities which all characters use, let each player decide on a "character schtick" -- a set of qualities which he feels would best result in the type of descriptions he feel would be appropriate to his character. The GM, of course, would set schticks for NPCs as he so desired.

For example, in a game set in 1920s Chicago, your typical mob thug might have the qualities of Power and Luck. Al Capone, on the other hand, would have Style and Finesse. Elliot Ness might want Skill and Luck.

Character Generation

Although this no longer true of many systems, there are still several systems out there that use dice for parts of or the entire character creation process. If you wanted to give even greater control to the dice during character creation it would certainly be a relatively easy task to create a list of qualities for any attributes or statistics which you roll for during character creation.

For example, when rolling 3d6 for Strength in **AD&D** you could have three different qualities: Muscle Mass, Power, and Physique. Although these would have little or no effect on actual gameplay, they would -- just like the qualities for skill resolution described above -- be hints as to how your character is strong, not just how strong he is.

Dice Pools

Dice pools, used in many popular games such as West End Games' **Star Wars** and the **World of Darkness** games from White Wolf Games, are a mechanic under which -- instead of raising a number you roll against as you increase your character's skill -- you increase the number of dice which are rolled against a stationary target number as your character's skill increases. Clearly the basic system described in this article does not work with such systems: you can't assign a set of qualities to the dice if the number of dice is constantly in flux depending on what is being resolved. There are three ways, however, to alter this system to make it usable in games which employ dice pools.

First, and simplest, is to simply choose two qualities. Have two specially marked dice -- each representing one of the two qualities -- and make sure these are included in any role. On any die roll in which only one die is involved, ignore the qualities.

Second, you can expand this concept by having a laundry list of qualities. The first might be Skill, the second Style, the third Finesse, the fourth Outside Influences, and the fifth Power. If three dice were rolled you would use the Skill, Style, and Finesse dice. If five were rolled you would use Skill, Style, Finesse, Outside Influences, and Power.

Finally, you can create a "quality pool" from which players may select the qualities they want. Combining the second option above with variable choice you can either limit the choice to pre-campaign (like Character Schticks), or let the players decide on each roll which qualities they want. The only problem with this latter potential is that it can sometimes bog down the session as players deliberate over which qualities to pick ("Let's see, do I want power and finesse -- or finesse and style -- or…?").

Conclusion

The system is incredibly versatile and very effective as a tool that almost any Game Master can use effectively as an aid to his game. That being said, it is important to realize that this tool is not for everyone. Those who have no difficulty describing the results of action resolution will have no use for this system. There will be those who simply don't find the system to be particularly helpful. Finally, I have found no way of adapting this system or some variant of it to resolution systems involving only a single die.

However, for those GMs who can use this system, and who find it useful, I think that it can be safely said that you will find your campaigns improved, and not lessened, for its inclusion so long as you remember that this is merely a system of guidelines, and not absolutes.

Helen Dixon, Meddling Kid

A Character for Unknown Armies

by Chad Underkoffler

Art by Zach Howard, Colored by Philip Reed

Summary: Helen Dixon is a child of great wealth. Her mother is a world-famous journalist. Her father is a genius at playing the market, and parlayed a modest trust fund into a tremendous financial empire; unfortunately, he's a drunkard. Helen was born to a life of privilege, with two silver spoons in her mouth. She has access to places most teenagers don't, and people in positions of power are willing to tolerate her presence due to her parent's position and power.

She cut her baby teeth while watching reruns of *The Twilight Zone*. Her favorite *Sesame Street* character was the Count. She stopped watching *Scooby Doo* because all of the monsters ended up being people in bad rubber masks. She read all of the *Nancy Drew* books by the time she was 8, and all of the *Sherlock Holmes* stories by 13. When the *X-Files* premiered on TV, she rejoiced. She drops snide postcards in the mail to James Randi.

Now 16, she spends her free time looking for the Unnatural in her home city. She's a spoiled brat with an allowance bigger than the average taxpayer's income, and she'll spare no expense to find out what she wants to know. Unfortunately, this means that a number of frauds, clueless cabalists, and even a couple of clued-in sorts have used Helen as a gravy train.

Personality: Velma and Fox Mulder have a kid, who's a cross between Encyclopedia Brown and Veruca Salt.

Obsession: Find scientific proof of the paranormal, at any cost.

Passions

Rage: Being treated like "just a kid" or "just a girl."
Fear: (Helpless) She's scared of cockroaches.
Noble: Helen champions any form of investigative work, from journalism to research chemistry to space exploration to police work to people who chase UFOs. "The truth is out there, so go look for it!"

Wound Points: 40

Stats

Body: 40 (Skinny)
Speed: 50 (F) (Jumpy)
Mind: 45 (Insightful)
Soul: 55 (Quirky)

Skills

Body Skills: General Athletics 35%, Struggle 15%.
Speed Skills: Drive 15%, Dodge 25%, Sneak 25%, Photography 15%.
Mind Skills: General Education 35%, Sleuthing (Notice) 40%, **Weird Science 20%**.
Soul Skills: Charm 20%, Lie 15%, Hunches 35%, Wheedle Cash from Parents 15%.

Weird Science: This skill covers all the fringe sorts of things you'd see on shows like *In Search Of. . .*, *The Unexplained*, or *The X-Files*. From "Chariots of the Gods" to Zener cards, from pyramid power to rains of stones, from chupacabras to the Loch Ness Monster, Helen digs it.

Madness Meter (H/F)

Violence	= 1H/0F
The Unnatural	= 3H/1F
Helplessness	= 1H/1F
Isolation	= 1H/0F
Self	= 1H/0F

Pick One

- **High Road:** Helen is generous with her time and money, always ready to help out an unfortunate, even if it means a delay in her personal quest for "the Truth." She's a dyed-in-the-wool do-gooder.
- **Middle Road:** Helen can be thoughtlessly cruel in the manner of those to the manor born. "If they have no bread, let them eat cake." She does have a good heart, and will make amends if she realizes that she offended someone, but that's still secondary to her quest.
- **Low Road:** Helen uses her wealth as a weapon, and believes that everyone has a price. She's willing to do almost *anything* to get proof of the Occult. . . and she's already done quite a bit of disturbing things. But heaven help those who she believes cheat her: she's got Daddy's lawyers on her speed dial.

Supporting Cast: Helen Dixon, Meddling Kid

Possessions: An expensive camera with all the extras, a brand new sports car, a canister of pepper-spray, a fingerprint kit, a bunch of detective-type stuff, a journal for notes, a pack of Zener cards, a copy of *The Collected Works of Charles Fort*.

Connections: Helen's mother is a famous journalist of some repute, so Helen has a few "family friend" news-industry contacts. She's been almost the sole support for a local palm reader named Katja Gregorakis, who is somewhat clued-in to the workings of the Occult Underground.

Adventure Seeds

- Helen has found out that something odd is going down in town and she's set out to track it down. She zeroes in on the PCs, and begins stealthily following them around, taking notes, snapping pictures, etc. If any of the characters display paranormal powers, she'll be in for the long haul.
- One of Helen's dad's drinking buddies named Ron Olson is a dipsomancer of some power. She's been nosing about, trying to get proof that he has "psychic abilities." Last night, she came upon him in a back-alley, levitating a dumpster out of the way so he could urinate behind it. As she started snapping pictures, Ron caught sight of her, wiggled his fingers at her, and *(poof)* she was gone. Helen's vanished! Helen's parents think she's been kidnapped, or worse, since the police found her purse and wallet in a seedy part of town. In actuality, Helen was teleported across country, to the PCs' hometown. She hasn't called her parents because, well, mom's in Kenya, and dad's passed out in the den. Besides, she's grown up enough to get back home on her own. All she has is a $100 bill she keeps in her shoe, and her camera. Heck, she might decide to hang around the PC's town

till mom gets back from Africa. . .

- Helen's hot on the trail of a black magician named Snake who claims to be able to summon demons. He's a clueless fool out for Helen's money, but she doesn't know that. Unfortunately, Snake's on a course for a head-on collision with Satan's Chosen Temple and Rebecca DeGhoule for horning in on her demonic summoning gig, and Helen will be trapped at ground zero along with the hapless confidence man.

Filler

Well, if you're reading this then I've probably been kidnapped by an evil cult. Drat.

See, when I signed up for this gig, I knew the day would come when there would be those who would seek to disrupt the flow of a normal magazine by dragging me away, kicking and screaming and dropping my Pez. And I knew that those who would seek to do this would be evil cultists. Don't ask me why; lucky guess, really.

So I prepared this filler column MONTHS/YEARS/DECADES (DELETE TWO) ago, in the hopes that, although I may be gone for now, at least you'll have some words of wisdom to cheer you up. I guarantee this column isn't topical, but hopefully you'll find it amusing. And, with any luck, you'll be sympathetic to my plight as cult-victim (which shouldn't be difficult, so long as I haven't tried to defend static or dynamic worlds in the past few weeks or anything stupid like that).

Anyway, over in the newsgroups several months ago (back when I was a fledgling at this gig, without the INSERT NUMBER OF MONTHS BEFORE KIDNAPPED BY CULTISTS months of experience), in the midst of an otherwise normal post, Scott Slemmons asked me to "Sing us a song! Something Gilbert-and-Sullivan-esque!" Always looking to give our loyal *Pyramid* audience what they want, I set out to fulfil this request, and twenty minutes later concocted this:

> I am the very model of a modern gaming editor.
> At times I feel like prey and other times I act like predator.
> Each month I am required to mold sixty thousand words, and yet
> Unerringly I err each week with typos that I didn't get.
>
> I have two walls of games which I have partaken of sporadically.
> My collections would be smaller if I'd taken up philately.
> But stamp collecting's not as fun because you can't eat bags of chips
> while cries of "Roll for damage!" trip excitedly from off your lips.
>
> The slushpile is my biggest foe; each time I turn around I see
> another ten submissions blink their beady little eyes at me.
> At full time, editing would be a challenge; as it is
> I've given up eating meals in lieu of photosynthesis.
>
> But all in all it's a great job, and hope I'm doing well with it,
> combining vision, detail, and my knowledge with a smidge of wit.
> With me the way I am I'm sure I'll never be a senator
> But I'm the very model of a modern gaming editor.

My abilities to come up with these kind of parodies on the fly has frightened people in the past. Perhaps I'll subject you to more of these some time. And the *really* sharp-eyed among you have probably already discovered my love of anagrams, more of which I may inflict upon you.

Anyway, don't worry about me; I'm sure I'll escape from the cultists before you know it. And if I don't, there's a dozen more emergency filler columns to take this one's place (though the webmaster may need to change references of MAULED BY MONGEESE to STILL KIDNAPPED BY CULTISTS).

Yessirree, just so long as I wasn't kidnapped the week before DragonCon, everything should be just fine.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Traveller: The New Era**, p. 77.

(Three stars) "Solanagen-based aliens from another subspace domain accessed our space to abduct people for experiments."

* * *

(We have read the MAULED BY MONGEESE filler column, and we hope Steven returns very, very soon.)

Pyramid Review

Elevator to the Netherworld (for Feng Shui)

Published by **Atlas Games**

Written by Tim Dedopulous, Bryant Durrell, David Eber, Geoff Grabowski, Mike Lee, Mike Mearls, Chris Pramas, Greg Stolze, Tim Toner

128 pages, $19.95

Beneath the violent and blood-stained world of the *Feng Shui RPG* lies the vague and equally violent Netherworld. A twisting maze of endless caverns and tunnels, packed with rejects and rebels, the Netherworld is a haven where refugees from the Secret War can come and get their teeth kicked in by a whole new population of freedom fighters.

In *Feng Shui*, those who possess the sources of mystical chi power determine the fate and flow of history. Attune yourself to enough Feng Shui sites, and the world warps into a shape most pleasing to you. The only place safe from the changing tides of history is the Netherworld, a place unaffected by these critical shifts. Once you've traveled the Netherworld, you change, too. Unlike the rest of Earth, you will always recall who you are in the fluid world order, and what needs to be done to put things "right" again. . . or at least, what you think should be right.

Everything is connected in (and to) the Netherworld, with tunnels linking gates from one time period to another. Those with Shaping power can call just about anything from the smoky gray nothingness: food, housing, weapons, companionship. Up and down are relative terms, and points on the compass are nothing but happy memories. It's populated by the cast-off peoples of a thousand different worlds that now, thanks to time travel, never existed. The "Inner Kingdom" is a blessing and a curse, giving people a second chance for success or failure when everything else has collapsed.

Since it's such a quirky place, adventures there can be tricky. This book tries to put things, as much as they can be put, in their proper place. Powers like the Four Monarchs, exiled rulers of a destroyed timeline, have forces and fortresses waiting to take back what they see as theirs. The futuristic and oppressive Buro runs a Biomass Reprocessing Center, feeding what they won't experiment on to the abominations they create. And in the center of it all: everyone's garbage. Literally. A context of sorts is provided for all this high weirdness, should the player characters live long enough to see the big picture.

The first part of the sourcebook takes a look at the big guns, those figures from the most stable timelines or those who have carved out the biggest piece of pie in the Inner Kingdom. The Monarchs, the Ascended and the Eaters of the Lotus are all dug in like hungry ticks. Then the little details that make the Netherworld truly come alive get the business: the television station, the entertainment and housing facilities, and the home turf for underdogs of the Secret War like the Dragons. By the end of the book, nothing fits into a neat little category, and giant infants and football fields full of writhing tentacles round out the page count.

Elevator to the Netherworld is a functional sourcebook, and it does its job. The Netherworld is a maddening place, so refereeing players through its labyrinthine depths is no walk in the park. If you want to know how this other world and its weird physics work, the book has you covered. You get descriptions of the players and the part they play in the Inner Kingdom. GMs have had lots of practical questions about how the Inner Kingdom operates, and this clears up a

lot. The whole thing reads a little like a road map, though, and is only a little more exciting.

If your gaming group wants to take on the Monarchs, this book tells the GM who they are, what their domain is like and the problems the Monarchs will throw in your players' way, but not much more. It's staid and lifeless, like an appendix to an unfinished rulebook. There are no adventure seeds, no in-depth discussions of the plans of the Eaters of the Lotus, no challenging suggestions for dropping the party in the middle of fascinating court intrigues.

Everything gets mentioned, but few things are explained in any depth. The bad guys' evil plots are thinly laid out in the vaguest terms. There are some named characters (the ones with the names are the ones that put up a good fight, while the nameless ones are cannon fodder), some fairly nifty new critters and a few keen toys to play with, but it mostly ties up loose ends without providing new material.

The art, which seems rather spare, is similarly uninspiring. Some good, some bad, most of it pictures of the architecture. We hardly ever get to see sketches of the colorful characters described in the text, and some of them scream for visuals. It mostly reinforces the feeling that this is a travelogue, and someone has already done all the sightseeing for you.

There are a few diamonds in the rough along this road. The Unexpected Deliverance Society is an extremely convenient deus ex machina, ready to spring inmates of every stripe from prisons across the Netherworld -- and the mechanics for them are a simple little joy. The Jammers' tree-house home in the Silent Jungle is a wonderful mix of high-tech toys and wilderness survival skills just waiting for some explosions to top things off.

Those bits are hard to come by on this superficial trip, though, and players are going to have to make their own fun. It's good to have the butt-kickingest game in the industry back on the market, but the buyer has to do all the kicking, because *Elevator to the Netherworld* just isn't pulling its weight.

-- Andy Vetromile

Pyramid Review

The Dungeon of Death (for AD&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Jason Carl

32 pages, $9.95

This is the latest in the series of **Dungeon Crawl** scenarios set in **AD&D**'s
Forgotten Realms. The idea behind the **Dungeon Crawl** series is to provide stand-
alone adventures harking back to the good old days of delving into a monster's lair,
killing everything in sight, and making off with the loot. While all are set in the **Forgotten Realms**, they are also
designed to be easy to transplant into other campaigns with a minimum of effort. Though this adventure is loosely
connected to events in the **Hellgate Keep** scenario, it easily stands on its on.

The production value is very good, like most of the recent Wizard releases. Where other companies of late seem to be
using larger typefaces and bigger margins, Wizards has moved in the opposite direction, allowing them to put more
information into smaller books while keeping the price down. The maps are clean and easy to read, the text is well-
edited with no glaring typos, and the few pieces of art are relevant to the story and not mere filler.

The **Dungeon of Death** provides the party with an abandoned dwarven mining complex, long since taken over by evil.
The plot, such as there is, involves the evil inhabitants attempting to lure adventurers into investigating the complex so
they can have their way with them. While it is nothing terribly new or inventive, it works as a default motivation if the
DM doesn't have time to come up with something better. One of the nice things about the **Dungeon Crawl** series is
that the adventures are designed to be so generic that it is easy to assign new motivations to the villains without having
to rewrite the scenario.

The actual dungeon in this case involves traps. A *lot* of traps. Unlike **Tomb of Death** . . . er, **Horrors**, the traps in this
case are all mechanical, and most can be circumvented if the party is cautious and clever. Since many adventurers tend
to be neither, the party is likely to get a bit bloody before they figure things out and slow down. As such, the module
could work very well for a DM looking to teach his hot-headed party the value of prudence.

The author obviously put some thought into the dungeon. Unlike the original adventures where 20 bugbears lived in a
10x10 room next door to a couple of carrion crawlers, the inhabitants and environment of the Dungeon of Death
reflects its history and current condition. Best yet, most traps and rooms have a brief explanation of what the original
builders had in mind when they constructed the place.

One unusual element is the Shadow Curse that affects the entire complex. Without wanting to give too much away,
suffice to say that everyone entering the dungeon (except the current occupants, of course) suffers an increasing
penalty the longer they stay within. While the Curse does provide something of a unique flavor to the adventure, the
module as written can be quite difficult enough with the addition of this sort of time limit. On the other hand, the DM
can either easily dispense with the Curse as it does not figure into the plot, or use it as a means to balance the party's
ability against that of the opposition.

The main foes in the Dungeon of Death are demons. The canon fodder are all varieties of Least Tanar'ri (Dretch,
Manes, and Rutterkin), with a few Lesser and one Greater thrown into the mix. The adventure says it is for 3-6
characters of levels 7-9, which actually seems a little high given that the vast majority of the foes within only have 2-3
HD. If the DM decides to remove the Shadow Curse, he should make sure he either ups the level of opposition or runs

the party through it at a lower level or they are going to storm through here like Sherman on his way to Atlanta.

While there is nothing amazingly original or innovative here, **Dungeon of Death** provides a solid, well-constructed dungeon delve adventure where the key to success lies more in caution and planning than on strength and fireballs. For ten dollars, it is money well spent.

-- Andrew Ross

[?]

by Hans-Christian Vortisch

This article deals with a number of small arms issued to special operations units around the year 2000, to update and expand the list found in *GURPS Special Ops* (and, to a lesser extent, *High-Tech*). Many of these weapons are completely new developments, while some are mere improvements of older weapons.

Pistols

Heckler & Koch P11, 7.62x36mm, Germany, 1976 (Holdout -2)
An underwater weapon developed for combat divers, similar in intention to the Soviet 4.5x39mm Tzniitochmash SPP-1 (p. SO99). It fires special darts from a pre-loaded 5-round, 5-barreled pepperbox-style cylinder via electric ignition. Two 9V batteries are located in the grip. After firing all five shots the complete cylinder has to be replaced by a new one (and the used one returned to the factory for reloading). The P11 can be used submerged to a range of some 15 yards. Outside of the water, it has an effective range of 30 yards, with a low firing signature (-4 to hear). Dam is impaling. The P11 was adopted by German Kampfschwimmer (combat diver) units as well as amphibious assets of both the KSK and GSG9. In addition, it was supplied to the naval commando units of Denmark (Frømandskorpset), France (COFUSCO), Israel (Kommando Yami), Italy (COMSUBIN), the Netherlands (SBS), Norway (Jæger), the United Kingdom (SBS) and the USA (SEALs).

Tzniitochmash P-9 *Gurza*, 9x21mm Gurza, Russia, 1994 (Holdout -1)
The *Gurza* (snake) is a SpecOps weapon firing armor-piercing ammunition intended to be used against opponents wearing body armor. It is one of the first Russian pistols using a synthetic frame. The P-9 is in service with Russian SpecOps units and is apparently the standard sidearm of the MVD OMON.

Glock 27, 10x21mm (.40 S&W), Austria, 1995 (Holdout +1)
This is a sub-compact version of the Glock 22 (p. HT109), with a corresponding shorter barrel and grip, which makes it very concealable. It has a 9-round magazine, but will also take the 13-round (AWt 0.6) and 15-round (AWt 0.65) magazines of its larger cousins (Glock 22, 23, 24 and 35), although of course those will make it harder to conceal. The Glock 27 is currently used as off-duty and backup gun by the FBI.

The Glock 26 is practically identical, but chambered for the 9x19mm Parabellum round; Dam 2d+1, Wt 1.6, Shots 10. A variant of the Glock 26 is issued by the Swedish Air Force together with a B&T sound suppressor as an aircrew self-defense weapon.

Fabrique Nationale *Five-seveN*, 5.7x28mm FN, Belgium, 1997 (Holdout -1)
This double-action-only pistol was designed as a companion to the P90 personal defense weapon (p. HT116). It fires the same round, which has good penetration. A mounting rail beneath the barrel will accept a flashlight or targeting laser (+0.25 lbs.).

Izhmash MR-443 *Grach*, 9x19mm Parabellum, Russia, 1999 (Holdout -1)
This weapon is the most serious contender to become the new Russian Army sidearm, replacing the 9x18mm Izhmash

PM and PMM-12 pistols designed by Makarov. It is a conventional pistol chambered for the 9mm Parabellum round, using a double-action system based on the Browning. In contrast to many of the latest handgun designs, it has a steel frame.

Shotguns

Benelli M4 *Super 90*, 18.5x76mmR (12-gauge 3" Magnum), Italy, 1996 (Holdout -5 with stock collapsed)
The latest in a line of basically similar semi-automatic shotguns, which are very popular with SpecOps and law enforcement units. The M4 can fire both standard 2.75" shot shells or the longer 3" Magnum shells (Dam 5d, Shots 6+1, Rcl -3). It has a collapsible stock and a mount for optical sights such as the Aimpoint M68 Close Combat Optic (CCO) red dot collimator (SS 10, +1.5 lbs.). A compact version with short barrel and folding stock is available (Shots 5+1, Holdout -4, $1,050). The M4 *Super 90* was selected by the U.S. military to replace the 12-gauge Mossberg M590 and older pump-action shotguns as the M1014 for the year 2000.

Submachine Guns

KBP OTs-23 *Drotik*, 5.45x18mm MPTs, Russia, 1997 (Holdout -1)
This machine pistol fires the 5.45x18mm round of the Izhmash PSM pistol, which is low-powered but has good penetration. It was designed by Igor Stechkin, inventor of the 9x18mm APS machine pistol of the 1950s. The *Drotik* (javelin) can fire 3-round limited bursts at a cyclic rate of 1,700 shots per minute. The low recoil of the round and an integral muzzle compensator keep it controllable (RS -1 in burst fire). After penetration a bullet multiplier of 0.5 applies. The gun was adopted by Russian internal security troops.

Heckler & Koch UMP, 11.43x23mm (.45ACP), Germany, 1999 (Holdout -4 with stock folded)
The *Universelle Maschinenpistole* (universal submachine gun) in .45ACP is the first example of the new submachine gun generation by Heckler & Koch. It was designed specifically for American police SWAT units. It is a light, simple blowback weapon with most components made of synthetics. The UMP has a folding stock and integral mounting rails for a vertical foregrip (reduce Rcl to -1 if fitted), targeting laser, flashlight and optical sight. A Swiss B&T sound suppressor can be clipped on in no time at all (Dam 2d+, +1.0 lbs., $700, Hearing -7).

The UMP is also available in 10x21mm (.40S&W); Dam 2d+1+, 1/2D 160, Max 1,900, Wt 5.7, AWt 1.2, Shots 30, ST 10, Rcl -1.

Heckler & Koch NBW, 4.6x30mm Royal Ordnance, Germany, 2000 (Holdout -2)
Nahbereichswaffe means "close-quarter weapon" and is the German term for the type of firearm called a Personal Defense Weapon in English. This weapon will soon enter production, to take the place of the 9x19mm MP5K. It looks like a large black plastic pistol, with the magazine in the grip. It is a fully ambidextrous gas-loading weapon based on the G36 rifle (see below). Beneath the barrel is a folding foregrip for two-handed firing. An extended 40-round magazine is available, but sticks well out of the grip (AWt 0.9, Holdout -3). Although it is easily overlooked at first sight, there is also a retractable stock for aimed shots (+3 Acc, using Rifle skill). However, normal use would be with the stock retracted, using the foregrip. The NBW has only small iron sights, but on the rear of the receiver is a mounting rail for optical sights. The standard sight is a very small self-illuminated electronic collimating sight made by Hensoldt. It provides rapid target acquisition with both eyes open (already figured into SS and Wt) and adds +3 Acc to negate darkness penalties.

Rifles

Heckler & Koch HK53A3, 5.56x45mm NATO, Germany, 1970 (Holdout -4 with stock retracted)
This assault carbine is a very compact version of the 5.56x45mm HK33A2 assault rifle, which itself is only a smaller variant of the 7.62x51mm G3A3 rifle (p. HT115). It has a telescoping stock like the

MP5A3 submachine gun. It is possible to have it with a fixed stock (HK53A2; Wt 7.25, Holdout -5) or a stockless butt cap (HK53A1; Wt 6.7, Rcl -2). Originally available with 25-round (AWt 1.2) and 40-round (AWt 2.0) magazines, H&K have since changed production to a 30-round magazine. The C-MAG double drum magazine holding 100 rounds is also available for this weapon (AWt 5.0, -2 Holdout). Since 1982 it can be bought with a 3-round-burst setting in addition to single shots and full auto (the designation then changing to HK53A5). It is often found with a flashlight mounted under the muzzle for close-quarter combat. The HK53A5 was adopted by a number of elite units, among them the Danish Frømandskorpset, the Mexican *Zorro* special forces, the Norwegian Jæger, the Senegalese marine commandos, the Mobile Security Division (MSD) teams of the U.S. State Department's Diplomatic Security Service (DSS), and some German SWAT units.

(In *GURPS Special Ops* it is wrongly called a variant of the MP5 (p. SO106). The stats also seem to be rather off.)

Heckler & Koch G8, 7.62x51mm NATO, Germany, 1982 (Holdout -7)

A heavy automatic rifle developed from the HK21A1 machine gun (p. HT120). Classified as a sniper support rifle, it has a match-grade quick-change barrel, a bipod and a Hensoldt 4X scope (+2 Acc). The standard feed device is the 20-round magazine of the G3 rifle, but a 50-round drum magazine is available (AWt 4.3). By installing an adapter, it can use disintegrating belts of the 7.62x51mm Rheinmetall MG3 or other NATO machine guns instead (AWt 6.6 for a 100-round belt). The G8 is capable of precision single shots, 3-round controlled bursts and full automatic fire. The weapon is used by all German military SpecOps units (*Fernspäher*, *Kampfschwimmer* and KSK), as well as the German border police, GSG9 and some SWAT units.

Colt M4, 5.56x45mm NATO, USA, 1986 (Holdout -5)

The Colt M4 (CAR-15A2 Model 720) assault carbine with its short barrel and telescopic stock is the linear descendent of the M177E2 *Commando* (CAR-15A1 Model 629) dating to 1967 (p. HT115). Like the full-size M16A2, it is incapable of full automatic fire, but will fire 3-round limited bursts instead. The barrel will mount the 40x46mmR Colt M203A1 underbarrel grenade launcher (p. HT121) or the 12-gauge KAC *Master Key S* underbarrel shotgun (a cut-down Remington Model 870, p. HT112, Shots 3+1). In 1986 the M4 was adopted as a service weapon for vehicle crews, radio operators, forward observers, etc. by the U.S. Marines, but not until 1994 by the U.S. Army.

Basically similar carbines capable of full automatic fire at RoF 15* (e.g. the CAR-15A2 Model 723) had been in use with the U.S. Navy SEALs and U.S. Army 1st SFOD-Delta since the mid-1980s, until they were replaced by the M4A1 (below). SpecOps units in France, Greece, Guatemala, Kuwait, Mexico, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and others have also adopted full auto variants, as did some American SWAT units like those of the LAPD, the DEA and the U.S. Marshals Service. Semi-automatic versions (RoF 3~) have been likewise popular with U.S. law enforcement units in recent years.

Diemaco of Canada produce a licensed full auto copy of the M4 as the C8 (CAR-15A2 Model 725), which was adopted by the Canadian, Danish and Dutch military and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

The M4A1 (CAR-15A3 Model 927) of 1994 is intended for SpecOps personnel only. Unlike the M4, it can fire full automatic instead of 3-round bursts and in addition its carrying handle can be removed as on the M16A3, to allow the easy installation of optical sights; RoF 15*. Optronics used with the M4A1 include the AN/PVS-4 image-intensifying night sight (+2 Acc, +3.3 lbs.), AN/PAS-13 thermal imaging sight (+2 Acc, +4.5 lbs.), AN/PAQ-4C IR-targeting laser (U.S. Army, +0.25 lbs.), AN/PEQ-2 IR-targeting laser/illuminator (U.S. Navy, +0.7 lbs.), ACOG reflex sight (SS 8, +0.5 lbs.), ACOG 4X scope (+2 Acc, +0.6 lbs.) and the Aimpoint M68 Close Combat Optic (CCO) red dot sight (SS

8, +1.5 lbs.). A quick-detachable sound suppressor by KAC is in service with U.S. SpecOps units (Dam 3d, +1.0 lbs., -1 Holdout, Hearing -5). The M4A1 has been adopted by all U.S. SpecOps units, and the export version Model 977 has been bought by the Israeli Sayeret Mat'kal and some French military SpecOps units such as the Pathfinders of the 2e RÉP and the RAID antiterrorist unit of the French national police.

Since 1997 the aircrews of SOCOM, including the pilots of AFSOC and Delta Force, use the M4K. Hand-built by KAC from M4A1s, it is a further shortened M4A1, heavily modified for the specialized needs of an aircrew survival weapon. It has no carrying handle, using flip-up front and rear sights instead. It can mount all optical sights as above. All protrusions like the case deflector and the forward-assist handle were removed, to streamline the gun for fast exit from a crashed aircraft. It has a new, simpler telescoping stock and an integral rudimentary sound suppressor (Hearing -3), which is good for a limited number of shots only; Dam 3d, SS 10, Acc 7, 1/2D 200, Max 1,500, Wt 6.5, RoF 10*, Holdout -4.

All of these CAR-15 variants can take the 100-round C-MAG double drum magazine (AWt 5.0), which was adopted by a number of SpecOps units, including the French marines and naval commandos, the U.S. Navy SEALs and the Hostage Rescue Team of the FBI.

Tzniitochmash ASS *Val*, 9x39mm SP-6, Russia, 1988 (Holdout -5 with stock folded)
This assault rifle is based on the Kalashnikov action. The *Val* (shaft) is a silenced weapon with built-in sound suppressor, firing a 9mm round with low muzzle velocity, but good armor penetration. It has a folding stock.

The VSS *Vintorez* (thread-cutter) is the sniper rifle variant of the ASS. It has a wooden skeleton stock like the SVD and a mount for a 4X telescope (+2 Acc, +1.3 lbs.) or night vision sight (+2 Acc, +2.9 lbs.). Like the ASS, it is selective fire. It usually feeds from a 10-round magazine, but can use the 20-round magazine of the ASS (and vice-versa). Stats of the VSS are as follows: Dam 2d(2)+, SS 12, Acc 11+2, 1/2D 200, Max 2,000, Wt 6.5 (w/o scope), AWt 0.8, RoF 10*, Shots 10, ST 9, Rcl -1, Holdout -6.

Both weapons have been adopted by the SpecOps units of the Russian Ministry of the Internal Affairs by 1994 at the latest, and probably also by Army and Navy units.

NORINCO Type 89, 5.8x42mm Type 89, People's Republic of China, 1990 (Holdout -5)
The new Chinese service rifle is a bullpup design and seems to be inspired by the French 5.56x45mm GIAT FA-MAS rifle. It has a similar large carrying handle and a special pistol grip. The Type 89 is chambered for an unique round and offers 3-round bursts in addition to semi- and full-automatic fire. It can mount the 40x46mmR Type 89 underbarrel grenade launcher, which is a copy of the Colt M203 (p. HT121) and uses interchangeable grenades. There are also carbine, sniper rifle and squad automatic weapon versions of this gun. It is in service with elite units of the Chinese Army, notably those stationed in Hong Kong since 1997.

Accuracy International AW, 7.62x51mm NATO, UK, 1993 (Holdout -8)
In 1986 the British Army adopted the L96A1 (commercial designation PM) as its standard sniper rifle, replacing the Enfield L42A1. It is a modern bolt-action sniper rifle with synthetic stock, floating barrel, detachable 10-round magazine, folding bipod and Hensoldt 6X telescopic sight.

An improved, if basically similar model known as the AW became available in 1993. Developed in cooperation with the Swedish Army, it features a Hensoldt 10X scope and a new barrel with muzzle brake. The AW was adopted by Australia, Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Oman, Spain and Sweden (as Psg90). The Swedes also issue APDS rounds (Dam 9d(2), 1/2D 1,500).

A further development, the AWM, is chambered for the 8.6x70mm (.338 Lapua Magnum) cartridge. It is slightly longer and has a 4-round magazine, but otherwise similar to the AW. It was adopted by Dutch and Italian SpecOps units; Dam 9d+1, SS 15, Acc 12+3, 1/2D 1,500, Max 5,500, Wt 17.5, AWt 0.7, RoF 1/2, Shots 4, ST 13B, Rcl -3, Holdout -8.

The AWM-F was developed for the German KSK units. Adopted as the G22 in 1997, it is chambered for the 7.62x66mmB (.300 Winchester Magnum) round, has a folding stock and a variable 3-12X scope; Dam 8d+1, SS 15,

Acc 12+3, 1/2D 1,300, Max 5,000, Wt 15.8, AWt 0.7, RoF 1/2, Shots 5, ST 12B, Rcl -2, Holdout -7 with stock folded.

Izhmash AK-105, 5.45x39mm M-74, Russia, 1993 (Holdout -4 with stock folded)
One of the latest Kalashnikov weapons is an assault carbine adopted to replace the 5.45x39mm AKS-74U (p. SO100) with Russian *Spetsnaz*, helicopter pilots, tank crews etc. It has a shortened barrel and a folding stock. The magazines are identical with those of the AK-74 series. (Despite the official adoption it is unclear if it is actually in service.)

The almost identical AK-102 in 5.56x45mm NATO is offered for export; Dam 4d.

Colt M16A3, 5.56x45mm NATO, USA, 1994 (Holdout -6)
The standard full-size rifle of U.S. SpecOps units, commercial designation AR-15A3 Model 901. It differs from the common service rifle, the M16A2 (AR-15A2 Model 645), in the provision of the same detachable carrying handle/rear sight with integral optics mount as the M4A1 (see above). Also, it fires full auto instead of 3-round limited bursts. The M16A4 is identical except for its 3-round burst limiter.

KBP OTs-14 *Groza*, 9x39mm SP-4, Russia, 1994 (Holdout -4)
A new modular design fielded by internal security troops of the Russian MVD. The *Groza* (thunderstorm) uses components of the 5.45x39mm Izhmash AKS-74U carbine, but is a compact bullpup-configuration weapon chambered for the 9x39mm cartridge. The basic version has a carrying handle and a vertical frontgrip like the Steyr AUG for better control. It is often found with a 4X telescopic sight (+2 Acc, +0.8 lbs.).

A sound suppressor can be readily fitted; Dam 2d(2)+, 1/2D 200, Max 1,500, Wt 8.4, Holdout -5, Hearing -5.

Alternatively, the rifle can integrate a modified 40mm BP-30 underbarrel grenade launcher, which uses the same trigger as the rifle; Dam 1d+2 [3d], SS 10, Acc 5, Min 50, Max 440, Wt 10.2 (rifle + launcher), AWt 0.5, RoF 1/4, Shots 1, ST 11, Rcl -1, Holdout -5. HE and smoke grenades are used, which are not interchangeable with those used by Western designs patterned on the 40x46mmR Colt M79.

The same weapon chambered for the old 7.62x39mm M-43 cartridge was adopted in 1998 by Russian airborne (including *Spetsnaz*) and combat engineer troops. It is slightly longer and employs the magazine of the AK-47 series; Dam 5d+1, SS 11, Acc 7, 1/2D 400, Max 3,000, Wt 8.6, AWt 1.9, RoF 12*, Shots 30, ST 10, Rcl -1, Holdout -5.

With sound suppressor: Dam 3d, 1/2D 200, Max 2,000, Wt 9.9, Holdout -6.

With grenade launcher: see above, Wt 11.2, Holdout -6.

KBP SVU (OTs-03AS), 7.62x54mmR Mosin-Nagant, Russia, 1994 (Holdout -6)
A sniper rifle developed from the 7.62x54mmR Izhmash SVD (p. SO100). It is of bullpup configuration, but uses the same action, 10-round magazine and 4X telescopic sight as the SVD. However, it is capable of full automatic fire for emergencies! In addition, it has an integral sound suppressor (Hearing -5). The SVU was adopted by SpecOps units of the Russian MVD.

SIG SG551-SWAT, 5.56x45mm NATO, Switzerland, 1994 (Holdout -4 with stock folded)
This is a special carbine version of the SG550 assault rifle (used by the Swiss Army as the Stgw 90). It has a folding stock and 3-round burst option. The magazines are made from translucent plastic and can be clipped together side-by-side, to speed up reloading (-1 sec). The steel components are stainless and coated with plastic, while other parts are made of corrosion-resistant synthetics for use in maritime or tropical environments. It has a scope mount, popular sights including a Hensoldt 6X scope (+2 Acc, +1.0 lbs.) or the ACOG 3.5X red dot sight (SS 9, +1 Acc, +0.6 lbs.). The SG551-SWAT was adopted by the German GSG9 as the G37, and also by the French naval commandos and GIGN.

Heckler & Koch G36, 5.56x45mm NATO, Germany, 1996 (Holdout -5 with stock folded)
The new assault rifle of the German *Bundeswehr* is a conventional gas-loading rifle with folding stock, replacing the 7.62x51mm H&K G3A3 and G3A4. Widespread usage of synthetic materials keep it light and rugged. The magazines are made from translucent plastic and can be clipped together side-by-side, to speed up reloading (-1 sec). Its unique

features are its twin optical sights: a non-magnifying red dot sight is used for snapshots at short ranges (SS 10, +3 Acc in darkness only). Beneath this is an integral 3X telescopic sight for aimed shots at longer distances (SS 12, +1 Acc). An electronic image-intensifier for use at night can be attached in front of the telescope, negating darkness penalties (+2.6 lbs.). Only the scope can be used when the night sight attachment is fitted.

The G36E was adopted by Spain in 1998. It differs in having a simple 1.5X sight instead of the twin optics; SS 11, Acc 12, Wt 8.3.

The G36K assault carbine used by the KSK has a shortened barrel and mounting rails for both a flashlight and a targeting laser in addition to the optical sights; Dam 4d+2, SS 8/10, Acc 8/8+1, 1/2D 300, Max 2.000, Wt 9.6 (incl. laser and light), Holdout -4 with stock folded.

The MG36 squad automatic weapon is almost identical to the G36, but has a heavy barrel and folding bipod. It is usually issued with a 100-round C-MAG double drum magazine, but can of course also use the 30-round magazine; Wt 13.9, AWt 5.0, ST 10B.

Barrett M107, 12.7x99mm Browning (.50 BMG), USA, 1999 (Holdout -9)
This is a bullpup-configuration anti-material/sniper rifle based on the company's commercial Model 95. It uses a bolt-action and is more accurate than the old Model 82A1 (p. HT115). Features include a factory-fitted Swarovski 10X scope, a folding bipod, and a very effective muzzlebrake. It is usually issued with APEI ammunition: 11d(2) plus 1d-4 [2d]. The rifle was adopted by the U.S. Army in 1999 as the M107.

Alliant-Heckler & Koch OICW, 20x28mm and 5.56x45mm NATO, USA, 2006, (Holdout -7)
The Objective Individual Combat Weapon is the U.S. military's key infantry weapon for the next decades, replacing the 40x46mmR Colt M203 grenade launcher and some 5.56x45mm Colt M4 carbines and 5.56x45mm Colt M16A2 and M16A4 assault rifles with front-line troops. The SABR design selected in 1998 was developed by an international consortium headed by Alliant and including Contraves-Brashear of the USA, Octec of the UK and H&K and Dynamit-Nobel of Germany. It will be manufactured by the U.S. subsidiary of H&K. The fully ambidextrous system consists of a semi-automatic 20mm grenade launcher, a detachable, underbarrel 5.56mm carbine for close defense and the most sophisticated fire control system ever developed for a small arm.

The semi-automatic grenade launcher with its very short barrel is built in bullpup configuration and feeds from a 6-round plastic magazine behind the pistol grip. The 20x28mm HE grenade has four fuse modes: airburst, impact, delayed impact and "window". The airburst mode is especially important, as it allows the attack of foes behind cover. The grenade explodes 1 yard above the ground, the shooter being able to select the distance at which it explodes. In impact mode it works like the old 40x46mmR grenades. The delayed impact mode is used to shoot through light doors etc, exploding immediately behind the obstacle. The "window" mode is used to shoot inside rooms, the grenade detonating 1.5 yards behind the window. Each grenade weighs 0.2 lbs. and will cost about $25. With an accessory pistol grip, the grenade launcher can be used as a stand-alone weapon; SS 12, Wt 7.0 (w/o sight), Holdout -5. The grenade has a minimum range of 30 yards.

The underbarrel weapon is a medium-barreled 5.56x45mm assault carbine based on the H&K G36 rifle (see above). It takes all M16-type magazines and the M9 multi-purpose bayonet. Fire modes include single shots and 2-round limited bursts. The weapon can be used on its own, with an accessory pistol grip. It then lacks a shoulder stock, but makes a compact and light self-defense weapon; SS 10, Wt 5.1 (w/o sight), ST 10, Rcl -2, Holdout -4.

The Fire Control System on top of the weapon includes a red dot collimator with 3X magnification (+1 Acc), a video channel with 6X magnification (+2 Acc), a sensor package to measure air temperature, crosswind velocity, weapon angles etc, a laser rangefinder (not a targeting laser!) and a ballistic computer, which computes flight path and moves the aiming reticle accordingly. The video channel includes a thermal imager and video motion tracker. The thermal imager completely negates all darkness penalties, and has limited detection abilities in smoke, fog and through thin walls. The video tracker automatically tracks all moving objects in the scope, allowing quick engagement of multiple targets (same technique as on fighter aircraft!). The camera can be used to send the images to the soldier's HUD or via radio to upper echelons. The shooter chooses the grenade mode, lases the target for range, the grenades are programmed by an induction ring in the chamber, the computer displays the new aiming point, and the grenadier can

fire the weapon (with +4 to Guns/TL8 (Grenade Launcher) skill), all within 1 second. The sight is responsible for about $7,500 of the unit cost.

The forearm of the carbine has attachment points for targeting lasers and white light flashlights. The gun is scheduled to enter service in about 2006, although prototypes are already in pre-production. The designation is certain to change.

Machine Guns

Saco M60E3, 7.62x51mm NATO, USA, 1983
Contrary to the euphemistic description on p. HT119, the M60 did in fact leave quite a lot to be desired. Thus a product-improved version was developed, the M60E3. It features a second pistol grip under the barrel, a detachable, light bipod and a simplified feeder and barrel change system. The gun is delivered with a long and a short barrel. Stats with short barrel: Dam 6d+2, SS 15, Acc 9, 1/2D 900, Max 4,000, Wt 25.0. It can be mounted on the M122 tripod (15.0 lbs.) and various vehicle mounts. The M60E3 entered service with the U.S. Marine Corps in 1985, and was also adopted by the U.S. Navy (including the SEALs). The U.S. Navy partially replaced it by the M60E4 in 1994 (Wt 29.1), while the Marines selected the FNMI M240G instead, a variant of the FN MAG (p. HT120). The U.S. Army Rangers and Special Forces use the M240B.

General Electric GAU-19/A, 12.7x99mm Browning (.50 BMG), USA, 1991
The latest addition to the minigun family. Originally known as the GECAL50 and available for production since 1983, it was put into full production after its adoption by the U.S. Air Force in 1990 as door gun on SpecOps helicopters (specifically, the Sikorsky MH-60G Pave Hawk, p. SO82). It has three rotating barrels and two selectable firing rates, either RoF 16 or 33. The power requirement is 3 kW at RoF 33. It can fire 10-round controlled bursts or full automatic. The GAU-19/A feeds from linked belts or unlinked ammunition tanks, depending on installation. It is not found on a tripod. On the pintle mounts in the cabin doors of the MH-60G it feeds from a 750-round belt in the rear of the cabin. Apart from standard ball/tracer mix, the gun will usually fire APEI-T ammunition; Dam 12d(2) plus 1d-4 [2d]. APDS-T rounds are available since 1994; Dam 16d(2), 1/2D 2,000. The current manufacturer is General Dynamics.

FNMI M249E4 SPW, 5.56x45mm NATO, USA, 1995 (Holdout -5 with stock retracted)
A modified variant of the M249E3 SAW (better known as the FN MINIMI-Para), which is the improved paratrooper's version of the M249E1 SAW or MINIMI (p. HT120). The M249E4 Special Purpose Weapon was designed by FNMI, FN of Belgium's U.S. subsidiary, for special warfare units of the U.S. military. It has a shortened barrel and the M5 telescoping stock to make it more compact. The troublesome magazine feeder was removed, so that it can only use belts. An optical sight mount was included, and the forearm was fitted with mounting rails for various accessories, including a light bipod, a foregrip and a targeting laser device.

Rocket Launchers

Talley M141 BDM, 83mm, USA, 1996 (Holdout -5)
Military units tasked with urban combat missions have a requirement for a weapon with good performance against concrete and brick fortifications. The U.S. Army Rangers and Navy SEALs have used the Swedish 84mm FFV M3 MAAWS (a variant of the Carl Gustav Grg48, p. HT122) for this, while the Marines adopted the 83mm McDonnell Douglas MK153 MOD 0 SMAW (pp. SO103-104). However, both weapons are rather heavy, and the Army began to look for a disposable single-shot weapon. The M141 was classified in 1996 as the Army's new Bunker Defeat Munition. It combines a disposable launching tube with the 83mm MK118-0 HEDP warhead of the MK153-0 SMAW, which will breach 8 inches of reinforced concrete. Minimum range is 15 yards, but a longer safety distance is advisable.

Selected References

- Dockery, Kevin (1991): *Compendium of Modern Firearms*, R. Talsorian Games, Berkeley.

Although somewhat dated, this widely available book gives excellent information on many small arms, including complete technical data. Very few of the guns described above are included, however.

- Hogg, Ian (1996): *Jane's Guns Recognition Guide*, HarperCollins, Glasgow.
  - An inexpensive handbook, whose descriptions, pictures and data fulfill most players' needs.
- Hogg, Ian (1999): *Jane's Infantry Weapons 1999-2000*, Jane's Information Services, London.
  - The most valuable single-volume resource in the field of modern firearms. Older issues of this annually published tome are also useful. Likewise recommended are *Jane's Security and COIN Equipment* and, if you are really into it, *Jane's Ammunition Handbook*.
- Hogg, Ian (1999): *The Greenhill Military Small Arms Data Book*, Greenhill/Stackpole, London/Mechanicsburg.
  - Excellent source for technical data, manufacturers etc. 295 pages and worth every penny.
- Katz, Samuel (ed.) (since 1998): Special Ops: Journal of the Elite Forces & SWAT Units. Concord, Hong Kong.
  - A magazine-style publication concentrating on all types of SpecOps units. Nomenclature of the firearms used is often unprecise, but careful examination of the numerous photos will give good results.
- http://www.guns.ru/
  - Russian small arms.
- http://www.hkpro.com/
  - A lavishly illustrated site devoted to all guns made by Heckler & Koch, including the OICW.

Notes

Damage: Some of the guns have an armor divisor of (2). This is usually because the standard bullet that the gun in question fires has superior armor penetration against body armor (flexible armor and light metal plates). The rounds are not necessarily as effective against heavier armor such as ceramic plates or vehicular plating.

RoF: Weapons marked with two asterixes (**) are capable of limited bursts. These consist of a preset number of rounds (see descriptions). Up to three bursts can be fired per second. Add +3 to the effective skill of the shooter when determining the number of hits in a burst. Note that in burst mode the shooter cannot hose down his target.

Wt: Loaded weight of the gun, in pounds. Wt of the GAU-19/A is given without ammunition, as it depends on the installation.

AWt: The weight of the standard ammunition container. Optional magazines are listed in the descriptions.

Cost: Cost with one empty magazine, unloaded, including any sighting devices as per description. Weapons marked with an asterix (*) don't have optical sights included in their costs, although they are usually used with such!

Pistols

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
H&K P11, 7.62x36mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Imp	1d+1	10	2	30	500	2.6	1.1	3~	5	$1,000	9	-1	7
Tzniitochmash P-9 *Gurza*, 9x21mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+1(2)	10	3	150	1,900	2.9	0.7	3~	18	$500	10	-2	7
Glock 27, 10x21mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+	9	1	140	1,800	1.7	0.4	3~	9	$600	11	-2	7
FN *Five-seveN*, 5.7x28mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+2(2)	10	3	150	1,900	1.7	0.4	3~	20	$645	9	-1	7
Izhmash MR-444 *Grach*, 9x19mm, Guns (Ptl)	crit	Cr	2d+2	10	3	150	1,800	2.5	0.7	3~	17	$400	9	-1	7

Shotguns

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Benelli M4 *Super 90*, 18.5x70mmR, Guns (Shg)	crit	Cr	4d	12	5	25	150	8.6	1.1	3~	7+1	$950	11	-2	7

Submachine Guns

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
KBP OTs-23 *Drotik*, 5.45x18mm, Guns (MPtl)	crit	Cr	1d+1(2)-	10	3	100	1,100	2.4	0.5	3**	24	$450	8	-1/2	7
H&K UMP, 11.43x23mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	2d+2+	10	8	180	1,700	5.8	1.3	10*	25	$900	11	-2	7
H&K NBW, 4.6x30mm, Guns (MPtl)	crit	Cr	3d-1(2)	9	6	200	2,200	3.9	0.5	15*	20	$950	7	-1	7

Rifles

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
H&K HK53A3, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	4d	10	8	300	2,000	8.1	1.4	12*	30	$1,250	9	-1	7
H&K G8, 7.62x51mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	7d	17	11+2	1,000	4,200	21.8	1.65	13**	20	$4,800	11B	-2	7
Colt M4, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d-1	11	9	400	2,500	7.25	1.0	3**	30	$750	9	-1	7
Tzniitochmash ASS *Val*, 9x39mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	2d(2)+	12	8	200	2,000	7.0	1.4	10*	20	$750	9	-1	7
NORINCO Type 89, 5.8x42mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d	11	8	500	3,600	8.6	1.4	10**	30	$400	9	-1	7
AI AW, 7.62x51mm, Guns (Rfl)	ver	Cr	7d	15	12+3	1,200	4,200	16.2	1.0	1/2	9	$4,350*	12B	-2	7
Izhmash AK-105, 5.45x39mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	4d-1	10	5	300	2,000	7.2	1.2	10*	30	$250	9	-1	7
Colt M16A3, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d	12	11	800	3,900	8.5	1.0	15*	30	$900	9	-1	7
KBP OTs-14 *Groza*, 9x39mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	3d-1(2)+	10	8	400	2,500	7.3	1.4	11*	20	$500	10	-1	7
KBP SVU, 7.62x54mmR, Guns (Rfl)	crit	Cr	7d	12	11+2	900	4,000	12.8	0.7	15*	10	$1,200*	9	-1/2	7
SIG SG551-SWAT, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d-1	11	9	400	2,500	8.7	1.0	11**	30	$1,500	9	-1	7
H&K G36, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	5d	12	11+1	800	3,900	9.0	1.1	12*	30	$1,000	9	-1	7
Barrett M107, 12.7x99mm, Guns (Rfl)	ver	Cr	11d+1+	15	13+3	1,200	6,800	22.5	2.0	1	5	$7,500	13B	-3	7
Alliant-H&K OICW, 20x28mm, Guns (GL)	crit	Exp	1d+1 [2d]	12	10+2	1,000	2,200	14.0	1.6	2~	6	$10,000	11	-2	7
Alliant-H&K OICW, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	4d	12	8+2	300	2,000	14.0	1.0	3**	30	$10,000	11	-1/2	7

Machine Guns

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Saco M60E3, 7.62x51mm, Guns (LtAu)	crit	Cr	7d	19	10	1,000	4,200	25.3	6.6	10	100	$3,200	12B	-1	7
General Electric GAU-19/A, 12.7x99mm, Gunner (MG)	ver(crit)	Cr	12d+2+	20	14	1,500	6,800	(74.0)	0.25 per round	16/33**	750	$12,000	n/a	-1	7
FNMI M249E4 SPW, 5.56x45mm, Guns (LtAu)	ver	Cr	5d-1	14	7	500	3,500	19.5	7.0	12	200	$2,500	10	-1	7

Rocket Launchers

Weapon	Mal	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	Wt	AWt	RoF	Shots	Cost	ST	Rcl	TL
Talley M141 BDM, 83mm, Guns (LAW)	crit	Exp	6dx6(5) [6d]	14	6	500	1,000	15.7	-	1	1	$5,200	9	-	7

What's It Worth?

(All right, ten seconds to go. Cue audience. Cue Wick. And in five. . . four. . . three. . . two. . . one. . .)

"Welcome back to *Players Assume the Craziest Things!* And here's your host, Joooooooohn Wick!!!"

Thank you. Thank you. If I could think of something funny to say, you'd all be laughing now.

(cue laugh track)

Well, we've reached the end of another season. It's time to take one last look at those wacky players and the silly things they assume. So far, we've talked about starting on an level playing field, experience points, character death and even character perceptions. But this last one. . . whew. You may want to send the kiddies to bed early tonight, because tonight, we've got such a whopper, the censors are sweating thirty-sided dice.

Tonight, we've got three films, all based on a theme. The first at-home audience member to call in with that theme wins a special one-year supply of Eat-a-Sheet, the world's only edible character sheet.

Well, let's get on with the first film. It comes to us from a Jefferson Carter of St. Paul/Minneapolis. He calls it "Bait and Switch." Let's take a look.

(cut to Carter tape)

Here we have a group of freelance superheroes operating in Twin Cities area. These happy fellows (and one lady) hire out to the highest bidders, adopting the "If the money's right, we're there for the fight" attitude.

Well, that all works well and good until they're hired by a lawyer representing an individual who wishes to remain anonymous. "My client's son recently died from an overdose," the lawyer says. "He'd like to see the people responsible brought to justice. *You* can go where the police can't go. You can do what they can't. He needs you and he's willing to compensate for your services."

That's when he hands over a check -- from the attorney's law firm -- for $50,000.

"The next check will be double," the lawyer says, "if the criminals are convicted."

The heroes agree. The operation goes smooth, and the bad guys captured before you can say "unstable molecules." The case gets picked up by the same legal firm that hired the players and the jury deliberations last about as long as a Tyson fight. The players receive a hundred thousand dollar check and they spend it on danger room renovations.

So, what's the catch?

The man who hired the players doesn't have a son. His name is Hunter Rose. He's one of the crime lords of the city.

The criminals were competitors. Now, thanks to the players, Mr. Rose controls *all* cocaine on the west side of Minneapolis.

Those wacky players. Well, I guess what they never knew never hurt them.

Player Assumption #1: They're always doing the right thing.

* * *

Girlfriend: "Are you watching this?"

Boyfriend: "Not really."

Girlfriend: "That means I can change the channel."

<click>

* * *

(insert obligatory, repetitive and redundant Danny Elfman "bouncy, yet creepy" theme)

"Hello, kiddies! Your old pal the Wick Keeper here with another *deadliciously* demonic tale. This one I call. . . *Bug Hunt*."

(credit placard reads:)

<div style="text-align:center">

based on a short story originally appearing in
SHADIS MAGAZINE
written by John Wick
published by Alderac Entertainment Group

</div>

It's a sci-fi scenario that opens in the middle of things. The players wake up in cryo-chambers to the sound of claxon alarms, screams and ripping flesh; a splash of blood on their faces. They open their eyes and see spiders the size of cows moving like lightning through the room. A couple chambers are filled with a thick, web-like substance. If you listen carefully -- through the screaming claxons and the screaming bodies -- you can hear muffled voices begging for help.

The players fight their way out of the room. They fight their way to their weapons. They fight their way to the bridge and find out where they are. It's a small planet with a smaller research station. . . sending out an SOS. That's usually when the players figure out what's missing: their memories. Obviously, they're a rescue team here to answer that SOS. Right?

Wrong. When they get to the research station -- more spiders waiting for them outside -- they find out the truth. They're not a rescue team, they're mercenaries sent to steal secrets from the research center. . . at any cost.

Every corpse in the research station? That's their work.

Mercenaries. Merciless. Murder, murder, murder.

Turns out the researchers were finding ways to communicate with the spiders. The creatures are powerful psychics, and research shows ingesting spider milk is a powerful psychic stimulant in humans. That's what the players are here to steal.

Unfortunately, two things went wrong after the mission. The first was a group of spiders who snuck on board while they carried out their dirty deeds. The second problem? The players' employers don't want them coming back. Their ship was designed to detonate when it escaped the atmosphere -- only the spider serum would survive the explosion.

Of course, now that things have gone wrong, the research station sensors indicate another ship is on its way. A cleaning crew.

Can the players find a way to communicate with the spiders and save themselves from a band of bloodthirsty killers?

A group not a whole lot unlike themselves. . .

Player Assumption #2: The players are the protagonists.

* * *

Girlfriend: Yuch. Spiders.

Boyfriend: You've got the clicker.

Girlfriend: Yeah. Right.

<click>

* * *

The Starbucks Theatre Presents. . .
The Blair Witch Rip-Off
With your host, John Wick

Open on a group of players (three humans, one demi-human and one half-breed) in the woods. It's dark. They ran out of supplies a week ago. They have no flint, they have no steel. The NPC they hired (the guy with the Hunting and Survival Skills) took off two weeks ago. . . with all the gold, food and fresh water he could carry. He also got away with the magical whutzzit the king's gonna pay 'em ten billion gold pieces for. Apparently, the NPC wanted the reward more than they did.

How did this happen? The players treated the NPC like. . . well, like most players treat NPCs: a pile of bantha poo-doo. So, he left 'em. Alone in the dark.

They don't even know how to find true north.

And while they're out in the woods, the Ranger saved the kingdom, married the king's daughter and stand in line to inherit the throne.

Hey, wait a second. . . was that *Dueling Banjos. . .?*

Player Assumption #3: The world revolves around us.

* * *

Girlfriend: Isn't there anything *good on TV?*

Boyfriend: There's always the Playboy Channel. . .

Girlfriend: You had *to say that, didn't you?*

<click>

* * *

It's a sin we're all guilty of, not just silly players. We all believe we're the hero in a story told for our own pleasure. Like Neal Peart wrote, "We're only immortal for a limited time."

Players assume their characters are the protagonists. They assume the story revolves around them. They assume that everything the Game master tells them is true. They assume everything they know is fact. They assume everyone in the whole wide world is there for their amusement.

Players assume they will win in the end. After all, the books they read (schlock fantasy), the TV they watch (*Star Trek*), the movies they watch (*ID4*) all have happy endings. The hero defeats the bad guy, gets the girl and lives happily ever after.

And most importantly, the hero never -- *ever* -- dies.

Like in *Braveheart*. Or *Gladiator*. Or *The 13th Warrior*.

Or *The Usual Suspects*. Or *A Tale of Two Cities*.

Being a hero doesn't mean you live to see the end of the story. Ask Moses about that.

Being a hero doesn't mean you're always there when the villain goes down. Ask William Wallace about that. (The movie version, that is.)

Being a hero means you're willing to make sacrifices when they need to be made. Being a hero means you're willing to give up everything -- family, friends, loved ones, even life itself -- to make sure justice sees the light of day.

I read an interview with Wolfgang Peterson -- the director of *The Perfect Storm*. I was hoping he'd tell a certain kind of story. I think I'm gonna get my wish. He said [paraphrasing here], "It's a big story about a little struggle." The *13th Warrior* was like that for me. No saving the world. Just thirteen men standing against thirteen thousand, all to save a bunch of people too vain to save themselves.

Frank Miller's *300* has the same kind of energy. Three hundred Spartans standing against three hundred thousand Persians, their deaths buying time for the rest of Greece to get its act together.

So, what's all this amount to?

There's no such thing as a free lunch. (I'm showing my stripes.)

I've GM'd for groups who thought having big guns made them heroes. I introduced them to guys with *bigger* guns. They weren't heroes. They were Swiss cheese in seconds.

I've GM'd for groups who thought having big spellbooks made them heroes. I introduced them to guys who *didn't need* spellbooks. Frogs, every last one of them.

You want to be a hero? It takes more than 100 points, a cool name and witty banter. Just because you assume you're the hero doesn't make it necessarily so.

That's a title you've got to earn.

Small postscript

All right, enough fun for GMs. Next month, an entirely new direction for the column. Next month, *Playing Dirty: The Player's POV*.

See you then.

Of Copper Scrolls and Golden Troves

"Item 1: In the fortress which is in the Vale of Achor, forty cubits under the steps entering to the east: a money chest and its contents, of a weight of seventeen talents."
-- The Copper Scroll

People often tiresomely and pointlessly aver that truth is stranger than fiction. For most truths, and most fiction, this is no great surprise. What you don't hear as often, but which bears repeating in the context of genre-driven roleplaying game scenarios, is that truth is often even more clichéd than fiction. If the Copper Scroll had shown up in your **Dungeons & Dragons** game, rather than in Cave 3 of the Qumran "library" complex near the Dead Sea, you'd have thrown it out as the product of a lazy game writer. But no: in Real Life, there's a coded series of clues to a fabulous lost treasure, with direct relevance to two great and mighty religions, that has evaded searchers for almost two millennia. And it's carved in copper, and sitting in a museum in Amman, Jordan, slowly deteriorating. Waiting for you to rescue it for the cause of imagination once more.

" Item 37: In the stubble field of the Shaveh, facing southwest, in an underground passage looking north, buried at twenty-four cubits: 67 talents."
-- The Copper Scroll

The Copper Scroll actually turned up five years after the Dead Sea Scrolls began appearing, on March 20, 1952. This was one of the few scrolls discovered in situ by actual archaeologists, but its uniqueness didn't end there. Where all 800 of the other Dead Sea Scroll fragments were on parchment or leather, the Copper Scroll was laboriously incised (or punched) into (wait for it) a sheet of 99 percent pure copper. Its script and language differ from the other Qumran documents, being closer to Mishnaic Hebrew (implying a copy from a different source). And, unlike the other Scrolls, this was no theological treatise but a mechanical, almost routine, list of 64 locations with the treasure buried at each. The archaeologists only found this out in 1956, since the Scroll had snapped in two and oxidized into a ball; any attempt to unroll it would destroy it. The Manchester College of Technology managed to cut it into (23!) strips and then reassemble the entire copper sheet to almost its original 30 x 240 centimeter span.

The sheer amount of treasure (4,625 talents of gold and silver, or around 90 tons of precious metal) led some scholars to dismiss the Copper Scroll as a legendary or ritual work, discussing the "concealment of the treasures" as metaphorical progress. However, the tedious, dry tone of the Scroll itself (which matches in form actual treasure inventories from the island of Delos), along with the immense labor of the carving, argue rather that the Copper Scroll is just what it looks like: an inventory of treasure caches. And in 1st century A.D. Judaea, there was only one institution that would have that much money and a need to hide it -- the Temple of Jerusalem, where the priests were watching the entire countryside get ready to revolt against Rome.

Annoyingly, I wasn't able to find a complete English translation of the Copper Scroll, much less the Dead Sea Scrolls themselves, online; I like Geza Vermes' *The Complete Dead Sea Scrolls in English*, should you wish to pore further into these murky textual waters.

" Item 12: In the court of [unreadable], nine cubits under the southern corner: gold and silver vessels for tithe, sprinkling basins, cups, sacrificial bowls, libations vessels; in all, six hundred and nine."
-- The Copper Scroll

Although will we or nill we, we shall have to paddle around in them briefly when dealing with the Copper Scroll, if only to answer the question of what those Dead Sea Scrolls are that the Copper Scroll so emphatically isn't. In 1947 (the year of an entirely different discovery in an entirely different desert outside Roswell, New Mexico), a Bedouin throwing rocks heard the smash of pottery inside a cave near the village of Qumran. Pottery meant pay dirt to Bedouins, because archaeologists always wanted the stuff; the pots in the caves, it turned out, held some of the oldest Biblical manuscripts known -- along with 800 or so fragments of religious rules, commentary, poetry, and some fairly eye-opening heretical lore. The Dead Sea Scrolls, as the collection got tagged, immediately vanished into the care of an elite body of religious scholars who allowed almost no access even to copies of the Scrolls, and published very little

in the way of translation. From this slow, carefully controlled dribble came much of the conventional wisdom about the Scrolls -- that they were the products of an ascetic, holy community known as the Essenes, who lived in a quasi-monastic retreat nearby and held beliefs akin to early Christianity. This interpretation, however, was damaged (if not fatally undermined) by the release of all the Scrolls in 1991, when UCLA (among other institutions impatient at the stonewalling and selfishness of the official Scrolls team) made a photostatic copy of them freely available to all researchers. The cat was out of the bag, and the Scrolls became fair game for competing scholarship -- and competing pseudoscholarship, of course. So, bisociatively enough, the Scrolls could be anything from the Secret Works of Christ to Jewish theocratic commentary to the Atlantean Gospels. And the Essenes might have been more like the Michigan or Montana Militias than their pre-1991 press indicated.

Many of the Scrolls paint a fairly alarming apocalyptic picture of the End of Days, when the "Teacher of Righteousness" will be opposed by the "Wicked Priest" and tumult shall erupt throughout the land on the physical and the spiritual levels. Admittedly, this description wasn't too inaccurate, as Judaea was about to erupt in a gigantic, many-sided revolution that would end in the destruction of the Second Temple and the Jewish monarchy. To which the holy Essenes might well have said, "No loss." The vast majority of the Temple priesthood, according to something called the Damascus Document (discovered among yet another collection of scrolls, this one from the Geniza marketplace-cum-seminary in Cairo by way of Cambridge University), is actually held fast in "the nets of Belial." Only the true priesthood of the line of Zadok (rather than Levi) was safe from the Evil One and his Wicked Priest (it all sounds much more impressive in 1st-century Hebrew). Some scholars describe some fragmentary Dead Sea Scrolls as part of the "Zadokite tradition" (possibly cognate with the "Sadducees" of the Bible) detailed by the Damascus Document. The connection between Montana and Qumran can seem pretty eerie when you're reading the more exciteable scrolls. Of course, the widely variant character of the Dead Sea Scrolls inclines me to the notion that the Qumran caves held the library of Jerusalem, removed for storage during the rebellion of 68 A.D. This would explain why the ascetic Essenes, so often tagged as the holy men who wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls, seem so much like the "Builders of the Enclosure" (or as we'd put it today, "cultists in their compound" or "terrorists in their training camp") railed against by some of the other Scrolls themselves. All of this will have a nice "old-home week" feel for *Time Travel* campaigns flung hither and yon through the bloody past of the Holy Land by the constant release of death energies near places of power.

" Item Three: In the Great Cistern which is in the Court of Peristyle, in the spout in its floor, concealed in a hole in front of the upper opening: nine hundred talents."
-- The Copper Scroll

Other campaigns, of course, will center on treasure hunting, which is, of course, the natural thing to do when provided such a handy treasure tour guide as the Copper Scroll. The mightiest of the Copper Scroll-driven delvers is the former Baptist minister (and apparently now a convert to Judaism) Vendyl Jones. He's not an archaeologist, nor does he have a permanent dig permit from the Israeli department of antiquities, but somehow wanders the land with top-quality image and geophysical sensing equipment scouring the Copper Scroll for directions to the treasures of the Temple. To his credit, he seems to be genuinely interested in said treasure for its spiritual content, and he's found a jar that contains (quite possibly) anointing oil used in the Temple where he claims the Copper Scroll told him to dig. On the other hand, one jar (and a pile of pink powder he claims is ancient perfume) is pretty thin takings given the sumptuousness of the Copper Scroll's promises. Jones has also seen a "blue aura" inside some of the shafts where he's dug, and he finds the word "blue" in the Scroll as well; he helpfully points out that blue glows are also associated with the Incas and the Pyramids of Egypt, which surely have some bearing on things, because they have some bearing on everything involving half-crazed archaeologists.

" Item 64: In a pit adjoining on the north, in a hole opening northward, and buried at its mouth: a copy of this document, with an explanation and their measurements, and an inventory of each and every thing."
-- The Copper Scroll

Perhaps the code requires a second piece; the "copy of this document, with an explanation" promised in Item 64 of the Copper Scroll. It was, of course, this key (called the Silver Scroll by our boy Vendyl Jones) that the Templars found while digging beneath the Temple in the 12th century, and which they could decipher just sufficiently to become filthy rich and secretly control Europe and build all those cathedrals. The great thing about dragging the Templars in here, of

course, is that you can hide their "twin" of the Copper Scroll with any of the great troves of myth: the Oak Island Money Pit, the Rennes-la-Chateau documents, the Lost Dutchman Mine, the Amber Room, or (broken in grand "rod of seven parts" tradition) in all of them for proper *Cliffhangers* style treasure hunting. (And tie it into the whole "magical twin" archetype of Gog and Magog, speaking of apocalypses.) What the treasure actually is when all is said and found, of course, depends on your game. There's the Ark, the Holy Grail, the severed prophetic head of John the Baptist or Orpheus, a crashed "Star of Bethlehem" UFO, or the rest of the usual suspects, plus (of course) the tons and tons of gold and silver.

Or -- the textual analysis of the Copper Scroll seems to indicate the "diary" of a secret band traveling on many excursions by circuitous routes to bury a vast treasure a fraction at a time at certain (ritually? magically? geophysically?) significant points. Is the Copper Scroll a giant misdirection, and the real "treasure" comes from the route indicated on some map of Jerusalem and its environs, charting out a blue-limned ley figure that reveals The Secret? Is the Copper Scroll itself the map, a schematic circuit diagram for an experiential treasure achievable by meditation on its surface (a surface carved in the copper of Venus, goddess of mirrors and nasty-minded ultraterrestrials)? Given that the Temple in Jerusalem and the "Essene" compound near Qumran both show signs of sacred geometry in their construction (as, of course, does the crypto-Templar castle of Rosslyn in Scotland), perhaps it's just such transcendental topology behind it all, carved in copper by men who knew Christ.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

Murphy's Rules

?

Appendix Z: Incomprehensible Legal Boilerplate of the Future!

by Steven Marsh

Let's face it; people don't fear lawyers anywhere *near* enough.

In the far-flung science fantasy world of **Fading Suns**, this lack of fear is perhaps emphasized; what does a player have to fear from a mere Reeve, when they have access to blaster rifles, grenades, and wireblades?

The law.

It may not cook your internal organs from the inside out, but the law can be just as effective in ruining your life.

To that end, here is the *Incomprehensible Legal Boilerplate of the Future!* Shrunk down to a 10 point font with half-inch margins or so, this boilerplate should fit nicely on a half-sheet of paper. Although designed for **Fading Suns**, it should be adaptable for any science fiction universe where lawyers still exist; simply replace references of Reeves to whatever they're called. It's especially appropriate for worlds where confusion is the norm, like **Paranoia**.

The *ILBotF!* is perhaps most effective when a relatively straight-forward contract is put on the front; "The undersigned agrees to purchase one (1) Rampart Tree Mink," or "The undersigned agrees that they have received aid, in the form of information, from the Vao." Include spots for the PCs to sign, spots for relevant NPCs to sign, and spots for two NPCs to sign, and you're set. For added legal paranoia, include things like, "Please print the True Name of undersigned," or "Please list city of birth for verification purposes." Use a highlighter to emphasize "important" pieces. Be creative. Be feared.

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Adventure Ideas

- In the middle of an unrelated mission, The PCs are summoned to appear in court because of a contract they signed some time ago. Of course it would be inconvenient to attend, but do they want to risk angering whoever is bringing suit, or perhaps even the Reeves? Or do the players throw money at the Reeves guild to make the problem go away (or at least buy more time)?
- If all documents use the same boilerplate, then it might be possible for documents to become mixed up, resulting in all kinds of adventure possibilities.
- In a universe that has both lawyers and demons, what if the contracts of the denizens of the void happen to use the same boilerplate? Or could an experienced lawyer possibly negotiate a better deal from the powers of darkness than the PCs (or demon-dealing NPCs) could do on their own?

Pyramid Pick

Diskwars: Dragonkin Army Set and Farrenghast's Undead Revised Editions

Published by [Fantasy Flight Publishing Inc.](#)

Designed by Tom Jolly & Christian T Petersen

Boxed set with 7 sheets of disks, 1 sheet of components, and 1 rules sheet; $9.95

I was intrigued by *Diskwars* when I first I heard of the game. Was it Pogs, a wargame, a CCG or an RPG? Now that I actually have two of the eight army sets I accurately say that it is a combination of all four, yet different enough from them to be unique. The army set boxes each contain 8 perforated sheets of glossy full color cardboard which you punch your disks out of, and a huge double-sided sheet of rules. Each set is complete and ready to play as is, and takes only moments to punch the disks out of the perforated card holding them.

The disks are sturdy, difficult to bend and survive a level two allergy test (meaning it is difficult to sneeze your playing area clean of pieces). The pieces are full color with a semi-gloss finish that doesn't interfere with players reading the disk. The art is very good -- sort of a cross between Silver Age comics and Phil Folio's style -- and of consistently high quality. I was surprised that six or seven different artists drew the two sets of disks I have, as the styles are remarkably similar. For the most part the size of the art is about half the surface area of a *Magic: the Gathering card*, but there are the occasional oversized disk such as Marizyak The Hydra, which is about the same size. Given the size of the disks, the artists did an admirable job of conveying the essential identity of their object, opting for a more comic/cartoon feel over the art house portrait-style of *Magic: The Gathering*.

The disks themselves come it three flavors: massive land disks, component disks, and creatures. The components are all referenced in the rules sheet and are used during play, with spell disks having to be purchased with your army points before play starts. Land disks are huge, and serve only as staging areas; otherwise they have no effect of play. The bulk (and most interesting part) of any army are the creature disks. Each disk contains a few numbers distributed around their circumference. These represent the creature's attack, defense and toughness, movement and wounds. Attack corresponds to the amount of damage a creature can inflict upon an enemy; defense, the amount of damage a creature inflicts upon an attacker; and toughness, the amount of damage a creature can take before suffering a wound. Creatures with more than one wound can suffer a like amount of damage before being destroyed, while all others have but one wound. These figures are important during play and are very similar to the game mechanics used to resolve a *Magic: The Gathering* battle.

Much of the game shows it roots from *Magic*, but is uniquely different in that it adds a tactical aspect that CCGs lack; you can move your pieces around the table and your actual troop deployment determines whether you can intercept/block enemy units, not simply whether you have them in your hand or not. Spells can be cast from spell-using troops (indicated upon their disks) and have range, duration, effect (generally damage) and Level. Spells are cast during the activation segment and are purchased before play commences. In a familiar blast from the past, 1st level spellcasters can only cast 1st level spells while 2nd and 3rd levels can cast lower level spells as well as those of their

own level. Only one spell can be cast per spellcaster and the spell disks are discarded after use, so it is important to protect your wizards while allowing them to use those expensive spells you purchased for them. On the other hand, swarming a magic user with smaller, cheaper creatures is also a viable tactic. All the spells have ranges and getting your troops within combat range can be daunting; then again, Magic-using creatures are the most intimidating troops of any wargame. One important consideration is the fact that your spellbook (stack of available spells) will become depleted as you use each spell and then discard it; you need to strike a balance between having too few spells available and too many. As each spell is roughly the same point cost as a creature disk this can be a decisive decision which can win or lose the battle before your troops even take the field. Having a variety of powerful spells is all well and good, unless your opponent gives your magician the bum's rush by swarming him with cheap troops before he cast those hoarded spells.

Movement has a direct bearing on close combat. Each creature disk has a movement value that determines how far you move. Most wargames interpret this number as a distance in inches or centimeters; *Diskwars*, however, uses the number to indicate flips of the disk. A move of two means you flip the disk end for end twice, a move of three indicates you flip it three times and so on and so on. It is quite refreshing not to have to measure anything, and moving disks is reminiscent of marching green plastic army men as a child. Once movement is finished any disk which is overlapping another is considered to be attacking the disk below it. There is a very well-diagramed section of the rule sheet that deals with multiple overlaps, and it is nice to see the level of thought that has been put into the rules. Creatures have an attack, defense and toughness value. Attackers subtract this form the defender's toughness, and defenders subtract their defense value from the attacker's toughness. If either value exceeds the target's toughness a wound is scored. There are a number of abilities such as first blow and swashbuckler that modify basic combat to make it more interesting.

There is very little information about the world the game is based in, and I hope that Fantasy Flight Games corrects this as the world looks like it has the potential to be a full-fledged RPG. There are eight army boxes: Dragonkin, Farrenghast's Undead, Knights of Falladir, Lotharia Elves, Orcs of The Broken Plain, Dwarves of The Red Anvil, The Uthuk Yllan, and Acolytes of Timorran. We don't learn much about the other armies, and frankly we don't know that much about the army that comes with each box, either; there simply isn't any source material to speak of. On the other hand, an Orc is an Orc is an Orc (unless it's a Tynes or Pramis Orc, but that's a whole other story). Suffice it to say that the races are self-explanatory, and they have to be.

Diskwars tries very hard to be a miniatures wargame only without the pounds of lead, and does so admirably. If you like wargames but dislike hauling around thirty kilograms of lead figures or paying hundreds of dollars for said figures, then this could be the game for you. Likewise *Diskwars* is non-collectable, so the acquisition curve that makes CCGs like *Pokemon* and *Magic* so expensive doesn't apply. *Diskwars* is fast, easily picked up and inexpensive. I don't know if it's the wave of the future but it's a heck of a fun ripple.

-- Andrew J. Lucas

Pyramid Pick

Battle Cry

Published by [Avalon Hill](#)

Designed by Richard Borg

Boxed set, $44.95

Battle Cry is the first truly-original boardgame published by Avalon Hill since they were bought by Hasbro two years ago. In fact, it was under development at the old Avalon Hill under the name *Command & Colors*. Apparently, Hasbro liked the game enough to include it in its initial wave of game releases, which is a boon for gamers.

Battle Cry is a Civil War game for two players, but it cleverly avoids the dryness of most historical games. The components are gorgeous -- each piece is molded in plastic, and cardboard tiles are sturdy and punch out without the help of a matte knife. More importantly, the game is fast-paced (games can be finished in a half-hour), as simple as a game of *Risk*, and lots of fun.

Battle Cry is purely a tactical game -- there's no strategic level at all. The game includes fifteen scenarios based on historical battles. The scenarios range from the well-known (Bull Run, Gettysburg) to less recognizable ones such as New Hope Church or Brawner's Farm. They don't have to be played in any order, though it's fun to run through them all and see "who won the war."

One of *Battle Cry*'s best features is the inclusion of over forty terrain tiles to customize each battlefield. Shiloh will be covered in forests and woodlands, while generals at Murfreesboro have to contend with a winding river. Lots of terrain types are included, such as orchards, fences, and hills, which lets gamers easily customize their own scenarios. This adds tremendous variety to the game; each battle forces you to make decisions based on the terrain, or face certain defeat.

Actual gameplay is refreshingly simple. The object is always to capture six of your opponent's flags. Capturing flags basically boils down to destroying an enemy unit. There are four units in the game -- infantry, cavalry, artillery, and generals. As you'd expect, each unit has its strengths and weaknesses. Infantry is slow but sure, cavalry fast, artillery can pound enemies from a distance, and generals motivate their troops for a nice combat bonus. The only "statistics" you need to worry about is how far they move (usually one hex) and how many combat dice they roll.

Combat is fast, with few situational modifiers to bog down the pace of the game. If a unit attacks, you roll a number of special combat dice, with different faces. If you roll three infantry, you kill three infantry. If you were firing at cavalry, well, you're out of luck. If you roll a flag, the enemy is forced to retreat a hex. After a few minutes of playing, it becomes very intuitive. You may have to check the rulebook to see how a type of terrain interacts in combat, but since there is usually only a few types of terrain in a given battle, you'll rarely have to refer to the rules after the initial setup. And nothing is more pleasurable than putting your artillery on a hill and bombarding the enemy off the board.

What makes *Battle Cry* especially interesting is its unique system of activating pieces. To do anything in the game, you must play a card. Cards let you issue orders to a limited amount of units in one of three areas of the board: center, left flank, and right flank. There are also special event cards mixed in, which lets you use special tactics such as utilizing sharpshooters to assassinate a general, calling for reinforcements, using hit and run tactics with your cavalry, or even building impregnable fieldworks.

The card system creates some tense moments. The enemy may be pushing hard on your left flank, but you'll be unable to counter because you lack the right cards. While this may be unrealistic, it's a lot of fun. There are lots of decisions

to be made on your turn. Will you devise a careful plan to distract the enemy until you've drawn a proper counteroffensive? Or will you expend a precious card to withdraw your weaker units onto the hills, sacrificing a chance at attacking?

The cards also handicap battles in a historical way. Since Union leadership was generally poor, Union players will often find themselves playing with fewer cards than the Confederates. This means they'll have fewer options, and be forced to rely on more conservative tactics utilizing their often-larger forces. Despite the North and South having identical units in the game, this gives the experience of playing each side truly distinct.

Battle Cry's simplicity means that grognards who cut their teeth on past Avalon Hill games, like the *Great Campaigns of the American Civil War* series, will probably find themselves unsatisfied. It's not a historical simulation, any more than *Axis & Allies* is a detailed WWII simulation. Factors such as fatigue, morale, and unit training are simply not present. The battlefields are approximations of the real counterparts, and a particular strategy that worked in real life might not be possible. But *Battle Cry* isn't meant to reflect those things -- it's meant to be a fast battle game with a historical flavor.

Luck plays an integral part of *Battle Cry*, which is a bonus for some gamers, but despised by others. Sometimes you'll be stuck with a lousy hand of cards and bad dice rolls. No matter how good your strategy is, you're going to lose fast in this situation. Fortunately, this doesn't happen that often. Most of the time the battles are even, and there's not a clear winner until the very end.

There are several annoying typos in some of the scenarios. They range from the humorous (the battle of "Chickamunga") to the confusing -- some scenarios mistakenly include more pieces or terrain tiles than are included with the game. More scenarios would have been nice as well, given the amazing modularity of the game board. Hopefully, Hasbro will put some new ones on their website, along with the errata.

Overall, though, the game is real winner. Even people who wouldn't normally sit down and play a historical game might find themselves cheering their haggard infantry on and having a blast. Hopefully, Hasbro and Avalon Hill will continue the trend of making strategy games with high-quality components, lots of replay value, and solid gameplay.

-- J.C. Connors

Pyramid Pick

The Starfarers of Catan

Published by KOSMOS

Distributed by [Mayfair Games](#)

Written by Klaus Teuber

Boxed Set, $75

Unlike its predecessors, *Settlers of Catan* or *Seafarers of Catan*, *Starfarers of Catan* takes our intrepid players into the wilds of outer space where no one can hear you trade, even in German.

If you did not already know, *Starfarers* (or "Asterisk Drivers" as the AltaVista language translator likes to call it) is printed entirely in German, with the exception of the word "Carbon" which is spelled identically in both languages. Well, it's a good thing for us English-speakers that the lovely people at Mayfair Games hired translators to go through and reproduce every word in English. It gives the game a sort of "foreign movie" aspect for the first couple of sessions, as you'll reference the English manual, go back to the German book to look at the pictures, and then back to the English book to realize you're not looking at the right picture in the German book and in fact need to look at the other German book. . . but it's worth the effort.

The translations include a stapled sheaf of German-English playing card translations (each German card is typed out next to its English counterpart) and two stapled paper booklets reprinting the Almanac and Game Overview, sans images. The German versions of these booklets are included as well.

Other than during the initial rules reading, these pages come in quite handy whenever a card is drawn -- you need them to hunt down its equivalent section in the paper sheaf and locate the English translation. This takes up a lot of time, especially since most of the cards are essentially the same text, with the exception of a few choice words, so I've provided a shortcut recommendation (besides waiting for the English version of the game) towards the end of this review.

Parts? You'll get them. Lots of them. Four 6-inch Victorian-style spaceships that rattle, to which you can clip Ship Cannons (blue guns), Boosters (yellow pieces) and Freight Rings (the half-rings, which snap on amazingly well) to display your spaceship's abilities for all to see. This mothership represents every single spaceship in your fleet, so there isn't any confusion.

Instead of rolling a die, the mothership contains four plastic pebbles, one blue, yellow, red, and black -- combinations of which determine all of your transports' speed for this turn. If a black pebble appears, an event occurs and your neighbor must draw from the event card pile. I'll explain this later on.

The other pieces are transporters (spaceships), trading posts, colonies, and spaceport rings (to place around colonies). When using a transporter, you either leave it as it is or place it on top of a colony or trading post. For scale, the spaceport ring is a little larger than an American quarter.

The little gray rings represent Fame rings, and are placed on the tip of each spaceship. Fame rings are gained through

successful interaction with an encounter card.

The game board is a large, foldout map (22 inches by 33 inches) of the entire Catan galaxy. (Yes, Catan galaxy. Seems that every location in Catan is named Catan. Makes it really easy when you have to ask for directions, "Yeah, just turn left at Catan and when you go past the Catan, it's another 2 miles till you reach Catan.") In the spirit of the Catan games, the board has hexagonal movement lines, leading to clusters of three planets or alien trading outposts.

There are a number of planets to one end of the board, and this is where the players begin with pre-set colonies. The planets are numbered and as with the other Catan games, rolling the planet's number on two dice means the planet has produced a resource and all nearby colonies acquire one of those resources. The numbers are from 2 through 12, so a 6 planet is more likely to produce than a 3 planet. Unlike *Settlers*, there is no city building -- starports only mean that transports can be produced at that colony -- so each player only receives one resource per planet per nearby colony. Also, there is no thief, but there is still a penalty when a 7 is rolled -- resources must be sent back to Earth as tribute.

Resources consist of Fuel, Ore, Trade Goods, Carbon (Carbon in English too!), and Wheat. They can be used to create Colony and Trade Ships, Starports, Ships Cannons, Freight Rings, and Boosters. Three of any resource can be traded to the bank for one of any resource, but Trade Goods are two for one.

Exploration is somewhat like *Seafarers of Catan*; travel through space to reach planets, but this time the astrologers have looked ahead and mapped out the planetary locations and what resources they produce. The players are simply ignorant of what number the planets produce their resources on until they skim the planetary atmosphere. Sometimes the planet may be covered in ice or house a pirate lair, making it uninhabitable unless the player has the appropriate number of freight rings or guns available. Once hospitable, the planet's number is determined randomly from a chip draw.

Not only are there planets, but there are aliens to trade with. For each trading outpost at each alien planet, the player gets a special card to enhance his abilities: better resource production, ship upgrades, trading options, or additional fame.

I mentioned the best part of this game earlier, but it bears repeating: the Encounter Cards. Most cards are random logic puzzles. Another player reads the card aloud and asks the leading question. Based on the response, the appropriate part of the card is read. This can even lead to a combat encounter, but might include a gift of resources, fame, or even a wormhole transport to the other end of the board. Combat encounters answered a question I had: What's the point of upgrading the mothership other than for moving around or transporting items? Well, the encountered ship is represented by one of the other players (to the left, right or across), so it forces each players to "keep up with the Joneses." Excellent concept.

As with the other Catan games, the point of Spacefarers is to be the first to accumulate a set number of victory points. Victory points are acquired by defeating pirate lairs, restoring ice planets, gaining fame, becoming friends with aliens, upgrading the mothership, and producing colonies and starports.

I would have like to see some other elements with the game, like inter-player combat. The only interaction with the other players is competition for planetary colony and trade sites, building the better ship, and trading resources with one another. I'd like to be able to blast the competition out of the stars. (This was easily remedied by adding the following optional rule: If two transport ships end the turn in the same phase, the current player may initiate combat. Compare a mothership roll plus combat status of both players. Winning player has choice of taking a random resource from losing player or simply destroying the ship. Since two transport ships cannot reside at the same spot, losing ships that survive should be moved away one intersection, direction determined by the winner.)

The other problem with the game has to do with the plastic container trays. They're great. They sort everything perfectly. They're excellent bays, except that the encounter card tray fits the encounter cards so perfectly that you need a shoehorn to get them out of the tray. After enough of this treatment, the cards will begin to wear. If Mayfair reproduces this game, they should make a small, thumb-sized dip on one side of the encounter card pit to solve this problem. I'm planning on cutting a divot into the plastic myself.

I've been informed by those who own the game that the massive amounts of planetary chit-flipping can wear out the edges of the cardboard chits, causing them to lose their random aspect from those who are "in the know". A quick fix is to place the appropriate chits into separate cups and draw them from these cups as needed.

A good solution to the German card lookup process is to reproduce the card statements on card-sized slips of paper, purchase (or raid your dust-gathering *Magic* collection for) a number of plastic card sheathes, and put the appropriate card in with the appropriate translation. Well, it doesn't necessarily have to be the appropriate card, seeing as how it's in German, you're not going to be reading it, and you only need the card for the back design.

For the really sick and twisted, an alteration to the game could include playing a separate game of combined *Seafarers* and *Settlers of Catan* for each of the starting planets to determine colony positions at the start of the game, creating a month-long campaign (if you play every day of the month).

In conclusion, at a whopping $75, *Starfarers of Catan* is quite expensive, but you're paying for quality. Unlike other games that I've paid $45 dollars for and received a mere thin oak-tag like board and card chit pieces that could have maybe cost $15, the plastic pieces and exceedingly high production quality more than make up for the high cover price. Heck, the motherships can double as baby rattles if you're Daddy Warbucks.

The game is tons of fun, and like all of the Catan series of games has a high repetition factor and its own unique flavor -- the rules are easy enough to learn and the game is quite challenging and tactical.

(Special thanks to Ken Cooney for letting me borrow his copy of the game for reviewing purposes.)

-- Joshua Marquart

by Max Lybbert

Art colored by [Phil Reed](#)

Charlie entered the small room. Clean-shaven and modestly dressed, about ten other young men waited inside. Jeff, who had put him up to this came in, paid admission for the two of them, and silently showed Charlie to his seat. The unnatural silence made Charlie wonder if he was allowed to talk. Afraid of ridicule, he kept quiet and waited for the room to darken. A kind, fatherly face appeared on the large TV in the room, and Charlie began his first look into what some might consider a cult. . . .

As a story element, it's hard to beat a good cult. Fanatics who oppose the players' group at every turn, fight covertly, resort to brainwashing, and continually rant about conspiracies have a special place in roleplaying. The leader does a great job representing evil incarnate (generally by taking a "normal" or "wholesome" quality to the extreme), and the PCs are the only ones able to oppose him and his irrational followers.

A Few Important Concepts

In popular use, "cult" is reserved for (a) non-mainstream "cult followings" (like roleplaying games), or (b) fanatic religious groups. In this article, we will use the word in a broader sense to include any fringe group that encourages fanaticism, often exploiting members. Of course, while not all cults are violent, politically charged, or destructive, antagonistic cults almost have to be.

Above all, it must be remembered that cult members usually do not consider themselves such. They may feel unjustly singled out or persecuted, but probably feel that their "beliefs" are humanity's only hope. Some consider they have been given a divine charge to protect mankind, or encourage progress. Members are normal people, and may include college-age students, local officials, or anyone from the main population. Cult leaders may be respected in their community, and as such dealing with them will emphasize tact over direct attacks. Players who uncaringly kill cult members or leaders should be tried in court for murder or face similar consequences.

Before creating a cult for any game system, their place in the campaign must be determined. In a *Call of Cthulhu*-type horror campaign the cult may be only a minor antagonist--with the demon they worship representing a more powerful enemy. In such a campaign, the cult would serve not only as an opponent, but also as a living reference (and possibly the group would need to be infiltrated, or a protected artifact "acquired") for intelligence

gathering on the Big Guy in preparation for the final battle.

In *Torg* or fantasy-style campaigns, where certain locales are closely tied to plot development, cults (unwittingly?) could serve to protect an area from "contamination," or the site's unusual traits (i.e. whatever led the adventuring party to the area) could be directly tied to cult teachings.

A *Car Wars*-type future could see cults financially exploiting the masses as an attempt to return to normalcy (players would then need to determine if such exploitation is justified, especially if the cult can deliver on its promises). Cult leaders could also be involved in attempts to research magic, overthrow the government, or use occult means to get results.

In other campaigns a cult could compete with players for the possession of a specific item, a la *Indiana Jones*. In this case, creation of the item is just as important as the creation of the cult; both should fit seamlessly in the time period as well as the campaign.

A well-designed cult even has a place in a *Traveller*-style campaign setting. See Isaac Asimov's *Nightfall* for ideas.

Creation

After determining the campaign purpose of a specific cult, the GM must then determine any main teachings. Recent religious cults have included groups intent on beginning wars in key locations to "hasten the end of the world." Others have divided into twelve tribes, fashioned after Israel's wandering in the desert as recorded in Exodus. Branch Davidians believed David Koresh was a reincarnated Savior, and the Heaven's Gate cult believed that their suicide would allow them to board a spaceship and free them of problems here on Earth. Cults may also be paramilitary groups who are upset about past discrimination and want to fight the current system as revenge.

Beliefs revolving around the general evil of mankind (the "us vs. them" mentality), unavoidable catastrophes, or an unusual link between the leader and whatever gods believed in, are common. Information is often controlled, and leaders commonly resort to brainwashing. Individuality is often stifled "for the good of the group." Any beliefs that justify such exploitation can be used.

The GM should determine social structure, including recruitment and advancement. While some cults are physically isolated from the rest of society, this is not a hard and fast rule. Cult members may have "secret identities," able to function normally in regular city life, but harboring radical views. Sympathizers, such as local celebrities, while not members, may help such groups to seem more legitimate.

What forms of information control are used, how leaders maintain control and handle dissidents, existence and composition of security forces, and any ties to other groups/people (allies or opponents) should be decided. Key members could include the local police chief--effectively stifling any serious investigation into their practices, for instance. Carrying things one step further, the mayor's son may turn up dead; causing him to hire a group of private investigators (the PCs), who eventually uncover Things Man Was Not Meant to Know.

A brief history, detailing the group's origins and recent activities will make this much easier. Now is also a good time to settle on a name.

The formal organization must also be taken care of, with special emphasis placed on the leader. Unlike the (usually) sincere followers, cult leaders may or may not believe their own teachings. It is common, however, for a second-rate con man to begin a cult mainly as a means to exploit his followers, but eventually convince himself of even his most outlandish claims.

Other important cronies should be named and created. It is also necessary to detail the relationships among the upper brass. Failure to address succession can create several splinter groups upon the death of the cult founder, or important commanders could join together in a mutiny attempt.

Entering Play

Once the workings have been determined, it is necessary to introduce your adventuring group to the fanatics. Possible adventure seeds are only limited by the GM's imagination.

- As cults work heavily on recruitment, the party (or important NPCs related to the party) may be considered valuable potential members, or hired for a special job.
- A new "youth club" may require unusual amounts of teenagers' time, causing poor academic performance by new recruits (who also form extremely exclusive cliques), which leads a concerned parent to contact the adventurers.
- An unsolved crime could be linked to the group, or the cult may try to frame the party.
- Searching for an unusual item may cause the heroes to contact the cult -- only to be taken hostage. A mage (or cleric) may decide to investigate the location of a recent mass-suicide following up on a rumor about a powerful artifact's whereabouts.

Any direct dealings with important leaders should leave adventurers unsettled. Remember, as the leaders are greatly charismatic, they should be rather impressive to meet. Characters should need to remind themselves about the danger these impressive people pose to others. GMs who give the feeling that everyone understands the threat these people are to others is neglecting an interesting facet of story development.

Cults also have an uncanny way of repeatedly returning. Defeat of a cult should not be final. Sympathizers (whose numbers often swell and who become increasingly violent in direct proportion to time elapsed since the event) may develop vendettas against the PCs, and lead to whole new adventures.

Every cult needs its own place under the sun, though, in all likelihood not too obviously seen. Properly created, conflict with such groups will provide a welcome relief from hack-and-slash or other stale campaign genres, without upsetting campaign balance or requiring unnecessary cataclysms every few years.

For further information:

(Please note these sites are intended for research only, and do not represent the views of the author or Pyramid Magazine.)

- Branch Davidians:
  - www.usdoj.gov/05publications/wacoeval.htm
  - www5.zdnet.com/yil/higher/heavensgate/
- Solar Temple: detnews.com/1999/religion/9905/04/04290018.htm
- People's Temple: www.crimelibrary.com/serial4/jonestown/index.html
- Heaven's Gate: www.novareligio.com/davis.html
- Symbionese Liberation Army: more.abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/hearst990617.html
- Informative Sites:
  - www.rickross.com
  - www.kassiber.de/cults.htm

by Owen S. Kerr

Art colored by [Phil Reed](#)

Many RPGs have rules for acquiring followers, retainers, hirelings, and/or stooges, with the various AD&D incarnations among the most notable. These rules usually detail the Who, What, Where, and When aspects: Who is eligible to gain followers? What kinds of retainers are available? Where do they come from? When do people start following my character around?

Aspects that are often missing usually include the Why and the How: Why are all these people following the PC in the first place? How in the world is the PC supposed to keep them happy and subordinate? Many systems explain the Why with charts and tables that assure the player that it's perfectly natural, when one kills enough critters and builds some suitable architecture, for scads of adherents, lackeys, camp-followers, and hangers-on to come swarming out of the woodwork. These same rules very rarely touch on the How questions. They assume that the process for keeping the NPC followers happy is the same as the process by which these NPCs were gained: killing bigger, meaner and nastier things with too many legs and big, sharp, nasty teeth; exploring deeper, darker and more-imposing architecture; and gathering more and better treasures.

What the bulk of the various and sundry rules ignores is the social aspect of being a cult-of-personality leader. Here are a few guidelines for any PC interested in having an atypical group of followers, or for GMs who want to add some spice to the average cult leader.

1. Be Exotic

Let's face it. How many of us, if given the choice, would give up everything we own, our lives and families, to follow a charismatic cult leader, if that leader was, in fact, someone we knew from elementary school? Familiarity does breed contempt, and contempt from a follower is something that your future cult leaders need to avoid at all costs. Come from a strange land, culture, background, or (if possible) all three. If you're as common as dirt, make something up. In a fantasy campaign, hire a good (if unscrupulous) bardic type to elaborate upon your spurious humble beginnings. Playing in a Renaissance campaign? Historically, aliases and false identities were laughably common and easily obtained. In a modern or post-modern setting, fake ID, cosmetic surgery, and computer hacking can create volumes of material that says your character is whoever he wants to be.

An archetype for the exotic, enigmatic leader is from Robert A. Heinlein's *Stranger in a Strange Land*, Valentine Michael Smith. Smith, for those unfamiliar with the work, is a human who was raised by Martians. Upon his return to Earth, he became a notable cult leader, mainly by unwittingly following Steps #2, #4, and #7, below. (Also Step #11, but we'll get to that. . .)

2. Be Larger Than Life

Worshippers and followers want to be part of something bigger than themselves, something heroic, something grand. If you feel that you can consistently be that thing, you've taken your first steps toward godhead (or cult-leaderhood, at least). Cults of personality thrive on those aspects of the celebrated leader that are different from, and somehow better than, the norm. This can be difficult in a typical fantasy campaign, as miracles and magic are commonplace. Priests healing the faithful, and notable warriors slaying scores of foes are both mainstays of the genre. Now, a fighter healing the sick and curing the lame, or a scrawny mage slaying the Dark Hordes in hand-to-hand combat - that's noteworthy.

Harmless and extravagant eccentricities are another hallmark of the bigger-better-faster-more lifestyle so typical of a charismatic cult leader. For example, the most popular bard in the kingdom (an Elvish lad named Frezh-leagh) is known for giving horses away to people who catch his fancy. He goes through a lot of horses that way, but he's also gaining fame and notoriety. Think big (or at least odd) and bold. So, eat what you want to eat, wear what you want to wear, be loud, be pious, be holy, be profane, but do it in the biggest and most public way possible. Your goal is to have your name on the lips and in the thoughts and conversations of everyone in the area.

3. Reward Your Followers

Always a good idea, and a requisite for this endeavor. Your inner circle of devotees has to be convinced that everything that is good in their lives flows from your benevolence. Make your middle name "A River To My People." Money, power, glory, sexual partners; your character provides anything they desire. Rewards don't necessarily have to be material, but a well-timed gift or a share of the profits is rarely taken amiss. Make these gifts as personal as possible; let the reward reflect your understanding of the individual. Even monetary gifts can be personalized, if you know enough about the person; instead of a flat $2000.00, make it "Tomas, here's some money so you can buy your wife that refrigerator I hear she wants." This gives your core group the impression that you know and care about them as individuals, whether this is the case or not. Personalized gifts, designed to press all of the right buttons, are your best tool in keeping everyone in line and marching in the same direction.

4. Bad Publicity Is Still Publicity. . .

Persecution from the Establishment is a goal that your character, as a thoughtful and intelligent cult leader, should pursue. Vicious, hateful maltreatment by the Powers That Be and the unwashed masses is one of the catalysts that can turn a lunatic-fringe cult into a national movement or a multi-national religion. Rebellious youth and those that feel that the Establishment is keeping them down will flock to your banner like... well, like sheep; angry and disaffected sheep with a great deal of energy. This energy is a valuable commodity to the leader, and can be constructively channeled in many ways.

Consider the example of Hitler. (A bad example in many ways, but a good example of a leader who used personal charisma and a keen understanding of What People Want To Hear to his extreme advantage.) His persecution by the German government was grist for his rhetorical mill, allowing him to write his manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, while in prison. He capitalized on this setback by using his arrest and imprisonment to establish credibility with those sections of the German public that he wanted in his camp.

With an established following, bad press can also be the proof to your true believers and other conspiracy theorists that your cause is just and right. After all, the (Government/Church/King/Grand High Poobah) wouldn't have devoted so

much time and effort to discredit your cause if they weren't afraid that the Truth might come out. . .

5. . . .But Get Good Press When Possible.

There is no substitute for popularity. The adoration of the unwashed masses is what it's about, after all. To this end, What You Do isn't as important as What You Are Seen To Be Doing. If you stop the Crimson Hordes in their attempt to take the capital, make sure everyone knows that it was you. Take as much credit as possible, ideally more. On the other hand, one must be careful to be humble and self-effacing in the public eye. Pride is one of the few sins that the general public has a hard time forgiving, while a talented and successful individual is never more popular than when he presents an "Aw, shucks; 'tweren't nothin'" facade. Practice looking humble and abashed, in front of a mirror if necessary. Get your speechwriters (You do have speechwriters, yes? Well, go and get some!) to have a few words ready at all times, with lots of bits that make it look like you're ineffectually trying to spread a lot of the glory around. ("While I did slay the dragon, I never could have done it without the hard work and effort of, uh, of. . . my trusty blacksmith, Leopold! Stand up and take a bow, Leo! If you hadn't, uh. . . made me those, um. . . cleats! You made those cleats! Yes! Without 'em, I wouldn't have been able to climb the dragon's side and snap its neck like a twig! Way to go, Leo!") So get out there, stop those uncontrollable floods, heal all of those lepers, kiss those babies, defeat the enemy, and smile, smile, smile.

Important Note: In case it needs to be said, propaganda is Good Press. If the PC ever gains a measure of control over any media source, the presses (or equivalent) should churn nonstop.

6. It's Lonely At The Top (Keeping Yourself Separate)

Any true cult leader should keep himself separate and above the adoring masses. Part of this is just good theatre: gods-on-earth do not belch (or otherwise eructate), pick their nostrils, eat, sleep, or, as Sean Connery (The Man Who Would Be King) found out, bleed. Security is another important consideration; if only a select few know your eating, sleeping, and bedroom habits, you can maintain an area in which you can let your metaphorical hair down, occasionally. Keeping separate from the common herd lets you more easily control your public image, as well as minimize the effects of any social faux pas that may occur.

This is not to say that a cult leader shouldn't have friends. Your inner circle is your most important resource. Know their strengths and weaknesses; find out their deepest secrets, darkest fears, and sincerest dreams (both to sidestep blackmail attempts and for your own information); guard their secrets as if they were your own; and entrust them with your unswerving loyalty. Make them part of the great joke that you all play upon humanity. Ensure their happiness, and they will move heaven and earth to satisfy your every whim.

7. Pick A Cause And Stick With It

Ideology is an important aspect of any group, even if the mission statement boils down to "Kill monsters and take their treasure." The people that choose to follow the character will adhere, more or less, to his code. . . or rather, what they perceive that code to be. It is important, therefore, to have a good working knowledge of the notable or publicized actions of the character over the last few game years. If the character's personal belief system is that of non-aggression, but his most noteworthy endeavor is besting the Warlord of the Grey Marches in hand-to-hand combat, plan on the possibility that many of his followers will be rather militant.

The character's choice of causes should not be whimsical. Decisions made during the conception and birth of a new movement will have far-reaching consequences. The people that chose to remain with the group will do so based on their understanding of the beliefs of the leader and of the other group members. Historically, some leaders have found that they were no longer in control of the group of which they were nominally in charge. "They are my people; I am their leader; and I am hurrying to catch up with them."

A word on scapegoats: historically, groups have a tendency to stick together if they have someone to love (i.e. your

character) and someone to hate (the scapegoat group). Some of these groups can be a function of the existing social structure or religion (see #8, below); others are simply old grudges. On many levels, a scapegoat is simply an enemy that is too weak to injure you. Choose your enemies wisely, as there will certainly be many unknown to you.

8. Assimilate Other Belief Systems

One of the best routes to adoration by the masses is to claim to be part of the existing religious structure. Your character's success in this endeavor depends mainly upon the social structure of the culture, and the religious dogmas currently in favor. Professing celestial parentage is the standard practice, though the idea's increasing popularity renders it unworkable in many circumstances. One variation on this theme is to assert that the character is the reincarnation (or first incarnation) of a mythical leader. This works within a secular framework, as well. See the example of Yuri Otrepiev, one of several pretenders to the throne of the Tsar after the death of Ivan "the Terrible" IV. Yuri claimed to be Dmitry, the youngest son of Ivan. The real Dmitry had died ten years previously, but the pretender claimed that he had been spirited away to Poland, and called upon all true Russians to aid him in ousting the usurper. He enjoyed great, if short-lived, success. In trying to play his Polish and Russian supporters against each other, he proved a fickle and inconstant ally to both, and the Russian nobility had him killed. It is interesting to note that, though his body was burned and the ashes fired from a cannon pointing west (toward Poland), the common people for a time persevered in their belief in his legitimacy.

Assimilation is a tricky step, in that one must be cautious of taking on more of the myth than is necessary or prudent. If the Elder Scrolls say that there will come one who will deliver the faithful from bondage, fine. If He Who Will Deliver Us is missing his right arm, left eye, and has no feet, you just may want to seriously reconsider taking on this role. Oracles and prophecies are notorious for ascribing various unhealthy practices to the Chosen One. Play the role correctly, walk the tightrope of dogma and pragmatism, and you'll have a powerful tool: the political and social might of an established religion or ideology. Make a mistake, and the acolytes will be cleaning your brains off the temple walls with a sponge.

9. Make Friends With Those Stronger Than You

This is a step that is often overlooked or made subordinate to #8. All cult leaders are going to make enemies. It's a fact, and one that's impossible to avoid. In being popular, your PC becomes a political force, and there will always be people that resent the fact that you have some measure of influence with other people over which they have no control. The trick is to ally your PC with stronger political and social forces, preferably those that either have no interest in your sphere of influence, or those that have a vested interest in keeping your constituency happy. If you are starting the Cult of the Golden Cowpoke, make sure the Cattlemen's Association knows that the herds will be in Kansas City on time. If you let them know that the cowboys are happier with you around, and that you would personally be happier with a bigger house, better booze, more women, etc., you may be looking at the start of a beautiful friendship.

On the other hand, monolithic organizations are perfect examples of the tiger that you can ride, but only with utmost care. Hang on tight (but don't pinch), phrase demands in the form of polite and humble requests, avoid the use of spurs, and you just might be able to walk away if you have to. Remember the reason that you chose to align yourself with these people: they're stronger than you are. They generally have greater resources, more people, and a vested interest in protecting the status quo. Provoke them at your peril.

10. Never Forget Where You Come From

Or, at least, where you pretend to have come from. If you have the advantages of being born a poor shepherd, raised by mountain lions, suckled by a moose, or whatever, remember those humble beginnings. Keep your mental feet firmly planted, no matter how much you seem to be the scattered mystic. Know your business, and mind it well. Remember that those that raised you up can always bring you down. A corollary is that secrets are most easily kept if only one member of the group is still breathing. (While I don't condone killing off everyone that knows your secrets, I do understand the pragmatic psychology behind the idea, and why the practice is so common.) Either bind your friends to

you with hoops of steel and gold, or make plans for every contingency.

Always keep in mind that you are mortal, and that all of the people that follow your banner are (with the exception of a few fantasy campaigns) mortal, too. You all have hopes, dreams, needs, wants, and fears. Never make the mistake of buying into your own hype. In the spotlight, do that voodoo that you do so well, but when the crowds are gone, schedule some time to be yourself. If you don't let the power go to your head, you stand a better chance of keeping it attached to your body.

The Unspoken Rule

11. Die As A Martyr, Or Don't Die At All

This one is important, though not actually part of being a leader and having a cult. After all, if you're dead, you don't have a great deal of personal influence. The death of a PC is always a possibility in an RPG, and most games have a vast number of methods by which the body and soul may be separated. If your cult leader has any control over the method and timing of his passing, exercise that control to the utmost. If he doesn't, make certain that the core group of disciples has a well-rehearsed story about the "real" circumstances of their leader's demise, whether it involves ascending to the heavens on a pillar of light, strange women carrying the body to the Land of the Utmost West, or being carried away by a tornado. Make the fable easy to remember, emotionally stirring or evocative, and make sure they all know it backwards and forwards. This is your last chance at historical immortality (if not the physical kind), so don't screw it up.

Plot Seeds

The Last Temptation of Jhary

The PCs hear news of a new religious movement sweeping the area. The local governor hires the party (covertly?) to investigate the charismatic and popular leader of the movement. The nouveau messiah can be as truly pious or sincerely mercenary as you like, but he's been following all the rules, and can be a powerful ally or a dangerous foe. This seed is particularly ironic in an *In Nomine* campaign.

I Suppose You're All Wondering Why I Asked You Here. . .

A player character has, through accident or effort, acquired a modest group of followers. A friendly NPC (with a nefarious hidden agenda) offers to assist in the care and feeding of the new entourage. His methodology is remarkably similar to the ideas presented above, and he eventually handles all of the party's public relations. At a crucial moment in the campaign, the NPC hatches his plot, and the party is caught in a war of clashing ideologies. The PC must choose between losing his following or the possibility that the rest of the party could die for his cause.

Bibliography

* Survey of Russian History, Part 3: [Ivan the Terrible and the Tsars of Muscovy (1533-1682)](#)

by Rik Kershaw-Moore

Art colored by **Keith Johnson**

1: WARNING -- Security Clearance Ultraviolet

Knowledge or possession of the contents of this document by any citizen of security clearance VIOLET or lower constitutes an offence and is punishable by instant death or a year hard labor in the Hot Fun mines, which ever comes sooner. Don't do. It is just not worth it.

2: GM Introduction

The boring bit first. This is a short *Paranoia* adventure designed for a party of six or more RED level Troubleshooters.

Right, now that's out of the way. Something is destroying the Computer's bots in the depths of BLR sector below the food vats. The destructions all have something in common -- the bots were dissected with almost clinical precision. Obviously something has to be done about this, and quietly (since it is not wise to alarm the citizens), so the Computer has decided to bring together a team of crack Troubleshooters who are to find and remove this thing.

Of course, this being *Paranoia*, it would be too much to ask if the Troubleshooters knew exactly what they were going up against, and really that would only alarm them. So the cover for the mission is a mandatory camping holiday in the depths of BLR sector. And to make things more exciting for the Troubleshooters, they are going to be disguised as bots. Aren't they the lucky ones?

So what's the skinny?

Well, several week cycles ago an explosion at the BLR R&D facility lead to the escape of a highly experimental

stealth Warbot called M1M/K-04E. M1M/K-04E is the first in a new series of bots that are capable both of repairing any damage but also of taking on the appearance of any object made of metal, be it other bots, tools, or whatever. Unfortunately, this lack of coherent form gave the M1M/K-04E a serious identity crisis and sent it quietly round the bend. Now it is alone, confused, and very very hungry.

It is true to say that the guys from BLR R&D want M1M/K-04E back but since they didn't tell the Computer that M1M/K-04E had escaped in the first place; TON-I-BLR-4, deputy head of R&D has launched a covert and highly illegal recovery operation of his own.

TON-I-BLR-4
As deputy head of R&D Directorate TON-I is the consummate politician, which is surprising, considering he smiles far too much for his own good, and pauses for about 10 seconds after each word he speaks. Of yes, his ears stick out way too much as well.
Mutant Power: Charm
Armor: Reflec
Weapons: ROYGBIV Laser Pistol: 7
Important Skills: Bureaucracy 16, Motivation 10

3: Troubleshooters Introduction

The day starts out for the Troubleshooters just like any other, with them watching a mandatory re-run of the Teela O'Malley show in the BLR sector ready room, when suddenly a message tube arrives labelled with the Troubleshooters squad number on it. Inside this message tube is their call to arms. In the grand tradition of *Paranoia* silly props, hand your players a piece of red card and tell them that this is the mission briefing. If anyone quibbles tell them that under Computer directive 956-117-9146A-44 all mission briefing are now being delivered on paper the color of their security clearance and written in ink of the appropriate color. Or to put it another way, written in red on a red background.

So they can't read their orders, huh? Well not reading orders is Treason, isn't it? And we all know what the Computer does with traitors, don't we children? Don't forget to remind them of this fact, and also don't forget that asking the computer for clarification is also treason.

In actually, the mission briefing simply says, "Stay at your current location. A Vulture Squad will be along to escort you to the briefing room." Of course the Troubleshooters don't know this. One of the things that generally happens to Troubleshooters who don't turn up for mission briefings is that a Vulture Squad is dispatched to award tardy slips the hard way. And, lo, what comes marching through the ready room door but five fully armed Vulture Squad Goons fingering the triggers of their slug throwers in a meaningful manner. Hopefully the Troubleshooters ought to come to the wrong conclusion from a standing start.

Vulture Squad Goons
Weapons: Slug Thrower (12)
Armor: Reflec (L4)

4: The Mission Briefing

When the ashes have cleared and the clone replacements have arrived, the Vulture Squad marches the Troubleshooters off to the briefing room within HPD&MC's Bureau of Fidelity Procurement. The room itself is very scary, with integrated floor and ceiling shower drains as well as a frightening array of wall mounted torture equipment and gardening accessories. In the center of the room are a number of steel chairs with integrated arm and leg manacles. The Goons will efficiently strap the Troubleshooters into these chairs before leaving them all alone in the room, except for a looped tape that says "confess, confess, you know it makes sense, confess . . ."

Leave them there in that state for a while until the Troubleshooters are good and nervous, then have Integrator. . . err. . . *Briefing Officer* AGN-I-ANT-2 enter the room. She is an extremely severe-looking clone who is wearing clear plastic

overalls over her Indigo uniform and a pair of those full length gloves that vets wear. She glowers at the Troubleshooters for a second and then picks up a small flame-thrower and absentmindedly starts shooting huge gouts of flame across the room. As she does so she says:

"Thank you, citizens, for coming here today. Our Friend the Computer has noticed that you are all starting to look a little peaky, so it has decreed that you should undertake a mandatory three day cycle camping holiday in this very sector. Isn't that kind of our Friend the Computer?"

Anyone who doesn't express proper respect at this point gets a blast of 10,000 volts through the metal chair. Did we forget to mention that the chair is wired to the mains? After any clone replacements have been carried out, AGN-I continues:

"You will, of course, be provided with the state of the art camping equipment appropriate to your security clearance, as well as fun new outfits to enhance the whole experience. Now are their any questions?"

She will wait exactly one picosecond before plunging on.

"No? Good. Then all it remains for me to say is have a safe time."

Then she leaves the room. Shortly afterwards the Vulture Squad goons enter once more and march the Troubleshooters off to their point of departure.

AGN-I-ANT-2
Fidelity Procurement specialist and part time briefing officer.
Mutant Power: Electroshock
Armor: Kevlar
Weapons: Energy Pistol: 5
Important Skills: Interrogation 13, Intimidate 10, Psychescan 8

5: A Camping We Will Go

After yet another forced march, the Troubleshooters finally enter a large room above the main food vats of BLR Sector. Inside this cavernous space awaits three Blue clearance clones from R&D and three large crates. The first, and by far the largest, is marked *Camping Pleasure Enhancing Outfits*, the medium-sized crate is neatly stenciled *R&D Equipment*, and the smallest is labelled *Camping Equipment*. Cowering behind the three crates is a Totebot that is terrified beyond belief, for it has a damn good idea what is coming. This Totebot is here basically to serve no other function that to carry the squad's equipment and die in as spectacular a way as possible. Think of this bot as the *Paranoia* equivalent of the red-shirted security officers from a certain 1960's Science Fiction series.

As soon as the Troubleshooters appear, the R&D men get up and make ready to leave, stopping long enough to hand the kit list to one of the Troubleshooters. The R&D guys are not terribly pleased at acting as gofers for PLC and may even exact some measure of revenge by pointing to one of the Troubleshooters and saying, "Yup, he looks like a Funbot, all right," or something similar. The Vulture Squad goons will not leave until the clones have gathered all their equipment, donned their disguises, and entered the Liftbot.

5.1: Camping Pleasure Enhancing Outfits

This is the crate that contains the Bot disguises. Up until the moment they open the crate, keep the Troubleshooters in the dark as to what is in here. In fact, since the bot costumes are in smaller cardboard boxes marked simply Type A, Type B and (perversely) Type Z, they won't know what they get until they open the boxes for themselves. Since no one has appointed a mission leader (and feel free to remind Troubleshooters of this fact) the fairest means of dishing out the disguises is to get some scraps of paper, mark them A, B, and Z, and let the players pick one each. Really Cruel GMs may (of course) load the scraps of paper in any way he chooses, so that you could, for example, end up with a squad of Funbots.

A couple of more things to note before you let them loose. All the disguises have small sound generators built into them which make ridiculously silly noises every time the clones move. The Jackobot makes a sort of "psst" noise, the Scrubbot a "flumph" noise, and the Funbot goes "tad-da-da." You should once again encourage your players to make these noises, and if they get it right the effect can be very. . . err. . . musical.

Also, since the disguises are based on fire suits, they are heavy; after wearing one for a while it will become stifling inside. This means that not only is movement reduced, but the clones will also become very tired very quickly. In game terms, Endurance rolls are required for every hour the clone wears the disguise and any sudden movements will be heavily penalized.

5.1.1 Type A -- The Jackobot Disguise

This is your basic silver suit with bits of tubing stuck on at all angles. The suit has built-in rubber manipulators instead of hands that, while looking the business, are totally impractical and mean the wearer just can't grip anything properly while wearing this disguise. From around the suit's waist dangle a number of fake rubber tools of various shapes and sizes, as well as an oilcan that contrives to leak oil at every opportunity.

5.1.2 Type B -- The Scrubot disguise

This is also fundamentally a silver suit, made to look like a bipedal scrubot by the liberal addition of various cleaning implements. For example, instead of manipulators the disguise sports a mop for the left hand and a plunger for the right. The head of the disguise is nozzle-shaped and will squirt water whenever the wearer raises their arms above their shoulders.

5.1.3 Type Z -- The Funbot Disguise

Of the three disguises, this one is truly the most ludicrous; the silver suit has been painted in cheery red stripes, making the wearer look something like an artificial candy cane. The head of the funbot is the most human of the three, except that it sports a huge false moustache, and googley eyes that flop up and down on long springs so that the they get caught up around the wearer's feet. The Funbot disguise also comes with a silly hat that squirts foam, a twirling bow tie, and huge foam rubber silver and red clown shoes. These shoes will make walking a real struggle and running totally impossible. If the wearer has to make any sudden movements, a hard Dexterity roll is required to avoid embarassment.

5.2: R&D Equipment

The second largest crate contains a number of smaller boxes, all marked up with cryptic titles.

5.2.1: TX345-7b Clone Mortality Collar -- One for each clone.

The TX345-7b Clone Mortality Collar is R&D's latest effort to help speed up clone replacement. These devices, which look a lot like dog collars, fit around the clone's neck and use a built in blood monitor to detect when the wearer has expired or has suffered a fatal injury. This information is relayed back to the clone banks, thus speeding up replacement time. Well, that is the theory. The TX345-7b *does* have a nasty habit of sending back spurious signals when in areas of high electromagnetic interference, like, say, most of Alpha Complex. GM's should roll a d100 once every hour of game time; on a roll of 95 or higher the TX345-7b has falsely reported the Clone's death and a replacement will arrive shortly afterwards. Unless the original clone is already dead by the time the replacement arrives, then once the two clones comes within a 100 meters of each other the TX345-7b worn by both clones will malfunction and explode with 8P force.

5.2.2: MK-IX-Wilderness Protection System -- one for the party.

This is soon-to-be standard equipment on all expeditions to the Great Outdoors. This device is a one-meter-square cube of black plastic that stands on four legs of adjustable height. On top of the black box is a small radar dish that is designed to pick up intruders. Once an intruder is acquired, the black cube will then fire a number of synthi-banana skins into the path of the oncoming foe, thereby incapacitating them. Unfortunately, the radar is sensitive to anything behind it as well as in front of it, so that Troubleshooters will also find themselves coming under a fusillade of these plastic yellow skins.

5.3: Camping Equipment

Inside this crate are the following:

4 x Single Clone Tube Tents.
6 x Hand Lasers
6 x Monochrome Hand Laser Barrels
3 x Laser Rifles
3 x Multicolor Laser Rifle Barrels (miss marked as red)
1 x EMP Grenade (miss labelled as smoke)
1 x Bicycle
3 x Comm III
2 x Multicorder
451 x Wooden Chopsticks
1 x wetsuit
2 x parachutes

6: Sub Basement 4

Once the Troubleshooters have donned their disguises and loaded their equipment aboard the Totebot, the mission. . . err. . . *holiday* can finally begin. The Green Vulture Squad goons will hustle the Troubleshooters into a massive circular lift and lock the door behind them. Suddenly, everyone is in free fall as the lift plummets towards Sub-Basement 4. Try to convey the horror of a lift going out of control as the Liftbot screams madly over and over again, "Time to die."

Finally, after the lift shudders to a halt and everyone picks themselves off the ceiling, the door slides open and the Troubleshooters see the nightmare that is Sub-Basement 4.

For years this mammoth cavern, which stretches for kilometers in all directions, has been used as a dumping ground for everything imaginable. . . and some things that come right out of the imagination of Hieronimus Bosche.

Light is provided by the many florescent lights built into the pillars that support the ceiling, while the ground is covered in a semi-solid crust of psychedelic guano. This foul mutagentic stuff has been leaking from the food vats above for countless decades and is now many meters thick. Embedded in the kaleidoscopic goop are forests of strange three-meter-high pipes that have been discarded down here by one of the other BLR Service Groups.

Wandering through this hideous, dangerous landscape are a number of absolutely colossal scrubots. These immense bots, each the size of a three story house, have the unenviable task of trying to keep the food from building up too much using their ultra-high hydrochloric acid pressure hoses. Under normal circumstances these lumbering hulks will ignore the Troubleshooters; however, should the squad somehow wander into the path of the high-pressure jets of corrosive liquid -- well, that is just too bad.

Give the Troubleshooters a few minutes to get used to this fetid place before Friend Computer checks in on the Comm

Unit and demands an immediate update of how things are going. Once everyone is happy and well-adjusted to the Computer's satisfaction, it will suggest that where the Troubleshooters are standing will make an ideal camping ground, and will order them to make camp and have fun.

Just setting up the camp itself is going to be fun, since anything that weighs over 10kg will start to sink slowly into the multicolored swamp. This lack of solid foundations adds a new terror to camping: drowning. There are a couple of locations where a safe non-sinking camp site could be established; these spots include on top of the forest of pipes that stick up out of the ground, and in the wake of one of the mammoth Scrubots.

Of course, both of these solutions have their drawbacks. Setting up camp on top of the pipes might be more appealing as it gets the Troubleshooters up away from the goo. However, since the pipes are actually discarded nuclear fuel rods that have been dumped here by BLR sector power services, it *does* mean that you'll have to introduce the Troubleshooters to the joys of radiation poisoning. In the short term this causes their mutant powers to spontaneously activate after 1d10 hours. The longer term means radiation sickness but -- let's face it -- this is ***Paranoia*** so the Troubleshooters aren't going to be around long enough to worry about it.

The Troubleshooters could also set up their campsite on the ground cleared by the scrubots. This is solid floor and fairly safe, except for the puddles of concentrated sulphuric acid, and the ooze will slowly flow back into the furrows left by the Scrubots after 1d20 hours.

7: M1M/K-04E Attacks

In its normal undisguised form, M1M/K-04E looks like a 1.5 meter high eight-legged spider made of steel and plastic. M1M/K-04E's main armaments are an energy blaster and a military ROYGBIV laser pistol.

Being a shape shifting bot means that M1M/K-04E has huge energy requirements, and so it is drawn to those poor Troubleshooters like a moth to a flame. At first M1M/K-04E will infiltrate itself into the camp, scouting out the ground and hunting for a suitable target. It does this by sneaking up towards the camp and changing into a common object. This is the only time that M1M/K-04E is vulnerable, since the reconfiguration process isn't quiet. Taking an empty 2-liter plastic drink bottle and giving it a gentle squeeze can best simulate the noise M1M/K-04E makes when it changes shape. When the Troubleshooters hear this noise just roll a few dice and mutter something about strange ambient noises. Hopefully the simple-minded Troubleshooters will go off and investigate and will probably find some common object just lying on the ground just outside the camp. Probably they will pick it up and bring it back into the camp.

If a Troubleshooter tries to use M1M/K-04E in disguise, then M1M/K-04E will try to emulate the thing it is disguised as to the best of its ability. If it can't, it will just bleep pathetically and play dead. Anyone who tries to repair this dead equipment is in for a real shock, as M1M/K-04E morphs back to its real form and goes into full berserk psycho warbot mode.

MIM/K-04E will wait until the dead of nightcycle before it makes its move. Unless you are feeling cruel, the first target is that terrified Totebot. All the Troubleshooters know is that suddenly there is a terrific clanging noise, followed by a massive shower of sparks and a strange electronic squeal, then quietness. In the aftermath of the attack the Totebot lies lifeless, its cell ripped clean out of its body. The edges of the hole have been melted out as if by some powerful acid, and the bot is completely beyond repair. If they search the area around the camp, the Troubleshooters will eventually find the now-drained fuel cell lying besides yet another common piece of equipment, which is of course M1M/K-04E.

Once all is quiet again, M1M/K-04E will turn on one of the Troubleshooters. The attack is the same as before. The Troubleshooter who is to be attacked will be awoken by the same strange crackling noise; before they know it something lands on their back and starts to cut its way through their bot suit with its lasers. Try to keep the identity of M1M/K-04E a secret for as long as possible, because the idea is to terrify the Troubleshooters beyond belief.

M1M/K-04E -- Psycho Covert Warbot
M1M/K-04E has a very simple brain capable of accepting only simple orders. Currently M1M/K-04E's mental state

can be summed up as "get food, eat, so hungry, find food, need food" etc.
Armor: Reflec, & ECM shielding.
Weapons: Energy Blaster 10, Laser Pistol 10
Mem Cartridges: Be Patient: 10, Disguise: 10, Gather Data: 10, Stalk 10, Change Shape 10.

8: R&D Recovery Team Attacks

These bunch of six red level Troubleshooters from R&D have been dispatched secretly by the head of R&D, TON-I-BLR-4, to recover M1M/K-04E. Since this is supposed to be a secret mission, TON-I has not told his team about the Troubleshooters. What they *do* know is that they are hunting for a bot that can be disguised as anything and this includes other bots, which naturally has made them very jittery indeed. Jittery Troubleshooters are extremely dangerous because they tend to shoot first and ask questions later of any lone bots they might meet. So it is vitally important that your Troubleshoots don't wander off on their own. The tactics of the recovery team are to open up at extreme range with ECM shells from their Cone Rifles, which should incapacitate M1M/K-04E long enough for them to get close to push its off button. Of course, this will have no effect on either M1M/K-04E or the Troubleshooters, which will mean that the R&D Team will then resort to their laser guns and the occasional high explosive round from their Cone rifles.

R&D Recovery Team
None-too-bright Red level Troubleshooters who don't know much.
Weapons: ROYGBIV Laser Rifle: 6, Cone Rifle (ECM + High Explosive): 5
Armor: Reflec
Skills: None.

9: The Grand Finale in which we learn that it is possible to scram a food-vat

The R&D recovery team will be attracted to the Troubleshooters camp by the light display from the death of the Totebot, and then they will watch developments until ordered to attack by TON-I. The best time to attack is when the Troubleshooters are in the middle of dealing with an attack from M1M/K-04E. The first they will know is when the ECM shells start raining down, causing the Comm Units and muticorders to malfunction, essentially cutting them off from the help of Friend Computer.

Shortly afterwards the laser bolts will start to zip through the air before the recovery team charges into the camp. This will tip M1M/K-04E over the edge, and it will decloak and start attacking everyone in sight.

Then just when your Troubleshooters can't possibly stand anything more, one of the R&D guys, or even M1M/K-04E itself, fires a stray shot into the ceiling. The air is filled with rolling thunder as an entire food vat of Cold-Fun bursts from the ceiling above and comes roaring down towards the melee. For this, think epic, think biblical, and think Charlton Heston. . . only much worse. Everyone and everything is swept away by the towering wall of Cold-Fun, sendsing clones and bots alike tumbling across Sub-Basement 4. The initial impact of the thirty-meter high wall of Cold-Fun is the same as crashing into the ground at 100 km/hour, which is column 4 on the infamous Vehicular Accidents and Falling From Great Heights Table, so be prepared to replace some clones.

A: Aftermath & Resolution

Those who survive this massive tidal wave of Cold-Fun will have their lives further complicated when, 1d10 minutes later, an entire Vulture Squad platoon drops in to see what is going on. These guys round up the survivors and then hold them at gunpoint until TON-I-BLR-4 arrives.

Along with TON-I comes AGN-I-ANT-2 and any necessary clone replacements. The two indigo level citizens eye each other up suspiciously and seem to be old enemies. TON-I will instantly demand that the Troubleshooters be executed at once for their part in the destruction of so much computer property. AGN-I will in turn demand that the

R&D team be executed for attacking loyal computer clones who were innocently on holiday. However, when the dust settles and the Computer comes on and demands that someone clear up this mess, AGN-I decides to turn the Troubleshooters' holiday into a working one and hands them a bucket and mop each. . .

B: The End!

C: Hold on a Second, what of M1M/K-04E?

Depending on how kind you are feeling, M1M/K-04E is either destroyed in the fire fight, destroyed by the tidal wave of Cold-Fun, or escaped in the confusion and retreated deeper in the sewers and swamps of BLR sector, biding its time until once again it can cause more chaos.

D: The End again!!

E: Yes but where is the Mission Debriefing?

Well, since this wasn't a real mission it can't have a debriefing, can it? Oh well, okay, it *was* technically a mission, so technically there ought to be one. Conscientious GMs can have one if they want, others may prefer to seal the Troubleshooters up in Sub-Basement 4 and just forget about the whole thing.

F: The End For Real!!!

Drunken Secret Masters: The Cults of Dionysos

"[T]he individual, as the modern world knows him, began in that age to emerge for the first time from the old solidarity of the family, and found the unfamiliar burden of individual responsibility hard to bear. Dionysus could lift it from him. For Dionysus was the Master of Magical Illusions, who could make a vine grow out of a ship's plank, and in general enable his votaries to see the world as the world is not."
-- E. R. Dobbs, *The Greeks and the Irrational*

Groups of people, discomfited by the changing world around them, seek collective ecstasy rather than individual existence. Communing "with nature" using drugs, chanting, weird music, and heavy exercise, they enter ecstatic trances, see things their conventional neighbors ignore as delusion, and sometimes run off into the hills or wait on mountains for unknown alien entities. Rumors of child abuse, sexual orgies, and conspiracy to overthrow the government run wild. It's the story of a myriad of cults from today's headlines, and it's a story as old as the hills. The hills of Thrace, north of Greece, specifically, where this cult first sprang up and into history -- and if his cult wrote the script for all its successors, that's only appropriate for Dionysos, god of the masquerade.

"Unarmed they [the Maenads] swooped down upon the herds of cattle grazing there on the green of the meadow. And then you could have seen a single woman with bare hands tear a fat calf, still bellowing with fright, in two, while others clawed the heifers to pieces."
-- Euripides, *The Bacchae*

The cult of Dionysos reaches back at least into the Archaic Greek world of the 9th century B.C., contemporaneous with Homer, who mentions his ecstatic followers, the Maenads. It may go as far back as Mykenaean times; inscriptions to "Diwonusos" can be found on the island of Keos dating back to 1400 B.C. (The delightfully exciteable archaeo-anthropologist Marija Gimbutas takes the cult back to 4500 B.C. in the Balkans alone, based on bull-masked phallic figurines from Yugoslavia.) By the reign of Peisistratos of Athens in the mid-6th century B.C., the *tragodoi* ("goat-singers") who alternately sang hymns to Dionysos and represented his horned fertility aspect had specific duties in city ritual -- which the foundation of Greek, and therefore Western, theater. The official Athenian dramatic contests were held during the three Dionysia -- festivals of Dionyos. Which, if we let it, would lead us either back to Yule -- the Lesser Dionysia -- or forward to the Lenaea on Beltane (February 1); between the two is Dionysos' official second birthday, January 6. A selected group of Athenian women of good birth met the women of the oracular city of Delphi on the slopes of Mount Parnassus every two years during the Lenaea to dance the Dionysian ritual dance, the *oreibasia,* in the bitter cold. (The image of witches dancing with their horned god on the Brocken, or of any number of nights on bald mountains, should be coming to mind now.) This practice, at least, lasted well into the 2nd century A.D.; existing cults of Dionysos can be definitely located as late as the early 6th century.

Dionysian cults melded with Pythagorean mysticism; eventually Dionysos (conflated by now with Osiris) got his own official mystery cult, complete with ritual journeys to the underworld, passwords, and initiatory secrets -- and more drugged wine. The aim of these mysteries was, basically, to fully combine the rational soul and the irrational material world. Plutarch attests that one of the great truths of the Dionysiac mysteries was that the soul could be freed from the body both in the ecstatic rituals (astral projection?) and by death (making ghosts?). The post-Pythagorean mystagogues saw him as a metaphor for philosophical awakening and for "rational intuition."

"How do you know what Dionysus is? . . . What do you think it was we saw? A cartoon? A drawing from the side of a vase? . . . What if you'd never seen the sea before? What if the only thing you'd ever seen was a child's picture -- blue crayon, choppy waves? Would you know the real sea if you only knew the picture? Would you be able to recognize the real thing even if you saw it? You don't know what Dionysus looks like. We're talking about God here. God is serious business."
-- Henry Winter, in *The Secret History,* by Donna Tartt

Which is quite a departure from the god of madness, of drunkenness, of the sheer irrational exuberance of wine and "all the flowing liquids" in the polite tones of Plutarch. He's the "twice-born" god, killed by Titans and resurrected by Zeus, or killed in his mother's womb and rescued by Zeus; distracted by a bull-roarer as a baby, and named the

"roaring god," Bacchus. Creator of dolphins, rider of tigers, he wields the sacred fennel stalk that brought fire to mankind, but wraps it in ivy. He journeyed all over Greece, driving men and women mad, watching them kill and eat their children, forcing the Greeks to add him, an unlucky thirteenth god, to Olympus rather than feel his anger. He is named Sabazius and Zagreus and Lenaeos. With so many names, he becomes almost a nameless god: even his 'true name,' Dionysos, simply means "god of Nysa," and nobody knows where Nysa is, although Alexander the Great (himself perhaps channeling the god of wine) thought his discovery of a city in India called Nysa significant. And indeed, intriguing parallels exist between Dionysos and the "nameless god of Kataragama," in Sri Lanka, often considered an aspect of Skanda-Murukan, a son of Shiva and a tutelary god of warriors, kings, yogis, and scholars.

"[T]his god who is the most delightful of all the gods is at the same time the most frightful. No single Greek god even approaches Dionysus in the horror of his epithets, which bear witness to a savagery that is absolutely without mercy. In fact, one must evoke the memory of the monstrous horror of eternal darkness to find anything at all comparable. He is called the 'render of men,' 'the eater of raw flesh,' 'who delights in the sword and bloodshed.' Correspondingly we hear not only of human sacrifice in his cult but also of the ghastly ritual in which a man is torn to pieces."
-- Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*

In its best-known form, the cult used strong (unwatered) wine, ritual dancing (similar to that of the Sufi dervishes), and (possibly) drugs like amanita mushrooms or belladonna to create a sense of "divine madness" in its worshippers. At the height of their enthusiasm (literally, "god-within -ness") and ecstasy (again, literally, "out of body" experience), the cultists would fall on an animal (or, many classical sources explicitly insist, a human -- J.G. Frazer, of course, is all over it as a sacred-king sacrifice ritual in *The Golden Bough*) and tear it to pieces with hands and teeth, in a fugue state known as *omophagia.* (Giving a nice happy medium between blood-drinking vampires and animalistic werewolves -- Dionysos was a shapeshifting god, too.) They make a fine "wandering hazard" for a good, bloody, **GURPS Greece** game. These wild women, the Maenads, killed Orpheus (either after he refused worship, refused to take part in the ecstasy, or gave himself up as a ritual sacrifice); their cry "Iä!" gives us not only pages of Lovecraftian dialogue but Dionysos' epithet Iacchus, "the roarer," which became Bacchus.

These are not necessarily the kinds of activities that you need to have bruited about. This helped drive the Dionysian cults into the form of the mysteries mentioned above. (It's perhaps useful to note here that one of Skanda-Murukan's avatars is Guha, "the Hidden," patron of all secret knowledge and covert activities.) And when you're a secret blood cult, it's only a matter of time before the law steps in.

"But never was there in the state an evil of so great a magnitude, or one that extended to so many persons or so many acts of wickedness. Whatever deeds of villainy have, during late years, been committed through lust; whatever, through fraud; whatever, through violence; they have all, be assured, proceeded from that [Bacchanalian] association alone. They have not yet perpetrated all the crimes for which they combined. The impious assembly at present confines itself to outrages on private citizens; because it has not yet acquired force sufficient to crush the commonwealth; but the evil increases and spreads daily; it is already too great for the private ranks of life to contain it, and aims its views at the body of the state."
-- Spurius Postumius Albinus, speech to the Roman Senate (186 B.C.)

And that's just what the Roman law did, in 186 B.C., when acting on a tip from a disgruntled cult member, the Senate outlawed the Bacchanalian cults and executed hundreds of them for crimes of forgery, murder, blackmail, and rape. The Senate found at least 7,000 Bacchantes in Rome, although the real ringleaders seem to have gotten off. (Livy claims the cult's founders were two plebeians and three out-of-towners.) As cults will, the cult of Dionysos went further underground; the Piso family crypts denote their devotion to the Horned God of Nysa with detailed carvings. And the Pisos eventually became the Antonine Roman Emperors. (David Icke claims that they were Reptoids who wrote the Bible and made up, well, everything.) Which is as good a place as any to mention the Dionysian Architects, who apparently belong to that "rational" Dionysian tradition I mentioned earlier. (Unless they're part of the evil Hawksmoor "dark ley" tradition of ritual murder temples.) According to the usual Freemason suspects, the Dionysian cult built the Temple of Solomon and passed their sacred geometric lore on to the Templars, from whence we join the rest of the Conspiracy, already in progress. (Tim Powers has a nice riff on the Dionysos myth as the true meaning of the *Prieuré de Sion* conspiracy in his novel *Earthquake Weather.*) Intriguingly, Aldous Huxley, one of the pioneers of LSD (drug-fueled visions, anyone?) also wrote about the Dionysian mysteries, and has long been fingered by anti-

British conspiratologists as one of the evil geniuses who introduced rock music (ritual dancing, heavy drumbeats) to America. A *GURPS Illuminati* or *Cyberpunk* party who dismisses such rumors as laughable might stumble into a rave and find themselves waking up in an alley covered with human blood. Iä! Iä! Dionysos fhtagn!

(Since our regular editor Steven Marsh has been [kidnapped](#), this week's Random Thought Table is being written by Esteban "Boon Bestowed by the Noonday Sun" Quigmare. Esteban is the enigmatic leader of the People's Conclave, a cult responsible for tearing the tags off mattresses, putting CDs back in the wrong jewel cases, kidnapping Steven Marsh, and other sinister activities.)

(At least this column is better than the "Mauled By Mongeese" filler column.)

Become a Fanatic NOW!

GATHER ROUND!

Though our coming has been [foretold](#) for eons (or at least months), none have heeded the signs of our arrival.

And now those of you who mocked these premonitions will PAY!!!

Because we, the members of the People's Conclave, are fanatics.

Now, I'm sure you all *believe* you understand fanatics. I'm certain you sit in your Global Conspiracy Command Chambers (or wherever you gather to relax), debating with an impassioned vigor that makes you believe you understand fanaticism.

NONSENSE!

Debating with a raised voice doesn't make you a fanatic, any more than singing "Leonard Bernstein!" means you know the lyrics to R.E.M.'s "It's The End Of The World As We Know It." No, being a true fanatic takes perseverance and skill.

1. You are always right!

There are those who would encourage you to listen to others' viewpoints, take their ideas into your thoughts, and strengthen your own views by rebutting those ideas, or else reconciling those ideas with your own when they conflict. But, really, since you're always right, why bother? You don't debate with a three-year-old, and you don't need any further ideas or dialog with cretins who fail to recognize your brilliance (or even divinity, such as yours truly). If you believe that the *Abacus CCG* is the best card game ever created, then it must certainly be true.

Incidentally, the People's Conclave has a wide assortment of reasonably priced T-shirts, tote bags, or other paraphernalia.

2. Everyone else is usually wrong!

Unless they are part of your trusted inner circle (in which case you already have the necessary material to neutralize them should they stray from the Path), everyone else is wrong. If there are aspects of their statements that are not incorrect, but merely unenlightened, you can point to them as uninitiated disciples of your viewpoint. In written mediums, quote them out of context to support your views; in the same way you can see movie reviews that say things like, "A worth. . .y piece of. . . summer entertainment!", so too can your opinions reveal the Truth from the mouths of unenlightened: "The *Uberotter RPG* is. . . unbelievable. I wouldn't. . . pass it up. . . if it were on fire."

The People's Conclave has free pizza offered every Tuesday in our Rec Room, plus fun games like *Balderdash*, *Hungy Hungry Hippos*, and *Friend Deprivation Resistance Breakdown*.

3. Hyperbole is your friend!

Take anything said by those who oppose you and distort it to serve your needs. Thus if you believe that diceless roleplaying games are the One True Path, then deride anyone who supports dice by saying, "So children who play 'Cops and Robbers' can only resolve their disputes with dice? HUH?!?" Contrariwise, if you are part of the Church of Dice, you can chastise people by saying, "So people who play *Monopoly* should just work out where everyone should go to make the best story? HUH?!?" Before long, people will know who the *real* intellect is. If need be, invoke Hitler.

For those of you interested, the People's Conclave offers a generous dental and 401K plan.

4. Have a focus to retreat to!

Some points others hold may have an obnoxious resonance; for these times, make sure you have a prepared statement. . . generally in the form of a catchphrase. "You just don't understand," is a popular one. "There you go again," served Ronald Reagan well in two presidential debates. "Upend the cauldron of LEECHES!" requires a strong personality to carry off consistently. Regardless, any would-be fanatic should have at least one (and probably several) stock phrases on deck.

The People's Conclave has a well-stocked library of texts (available only to members, of course) that may appeal to you, including works such as *The Bridges of Madison County*, *Everything I Know I Learned From My Domineering Cult*, and **GURPS Middle Ages 1**.

5. Leave chicken livers under the windshield wipers of those who oppose you!

Trust me on this one.

Well, that should give *you* the edge you need to become a fanatic. Of course, you won't be one of the True Fanatics unless and until you join the People's Conclave, which has denied shady ties to NASA and Blistex for over seven years. We have a fabulous compound/resort with an Olympic-sized swimming pool, two tennis courts, a Prison Spa, a petting zoo, six rotisserie. . .

. . . er, I have just been informed that Steven Marsh, former former editor of *Pyramid Magazine*, has escaped the Prison Spa. It seems that the latch is a little loose, and if it isn't pressed down all the way, it can be jiggled. . .

Bah! But that is not important. Though he has escaped our infallible clutches, Steven will no doubt face great challenges as he roams across country, trying to get back home.

But he'll probably stop by Dragon*Con before then. That seems like the sort of thing *he* would do. If you see him there, be sure to say, "Hi."

In the interim, as we try to flee the wrath of an unenlightened judicial system, we hope you have enjoyed our special "Cults! Cults! Cults!" Issue.

-- Esteban Quigmare
    Boon Bestowed by the Noonday Sun, Leader of the People's Conclave

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Star Trek: The Next Generation Customizable Card Game**, original set*

(Five stars) "So he *probably* wasn't gummed to death by a pack of baby minks."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

The Directive (for Aberrant)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by Carl Bowen, Richard Dakan, Kyle Olson

96 pages, $14.95

It's too bad *The Directive* doesn't have the primary-color characters of previous *Aberrant* roleplaying sourcebooks like *Teragen* and *Project Utopia*. It's hard to get excited about this secretive agency's inner workings, but it has the potential to inspire some fascinating stories.

The Directive follows the usual conventions of the *Aberrant* faction books. The goals and methods of the Directive -- an international espionage organization which watches and occasionally intervenes in the affairs of *Aberrant*'s super-powered "novas" -- are presented through reports, internal memos, and recruiting documents. There are new intelligence-related Backgrounds and Abilities, campaign suggestions and write-ups on important figures within the Directive.

So far, nothing unusual -- and unfortunately, *The Directive* lacks the narrative drive of some of the previous books. *Teragen* presented a radically different perspective on the "supervillains" of the *Aberrant* universe, showcasing over a dozen gripping characters and the conflicts between them. *Project Utopia* slowly built up a sense of horror by presenting the Utopians' achievements and then stripping away the bright, shiny exterior to show the hidden agenda inside.

By contrast, The Directive is amorphous, decentralized. It spends most of its time watching and waiting, and its leaders are so self-effacing that most of their own followers don't even know who they are working for.

On the surface, there's not much to go on, and parts of the book are dull. Once a Storyteller gets his hands on The Directive, though, he should be able to make the material come vividly to life in his own game.

This is one of the first *Aberrant* books to add a sense of menace to its universe. We know what's going to happen in this game's future -- the novas will go insane and launch a war against "baseline" humanity, ultimately leading to the setting of the *Trinity* roleplaying game -- but the previous *Aberrant* books one have been from the optimistic perspective of the novas, and even the Teragen believe in a bright future for nova-kind.

The Directive is the first book to portray the novas as a threat. To the Directive, the novas are the greatest danger humanity has ever faced -- and their harsh attitude is all the more chilling because we readers know they are right.

The Directive also makes it clear how difficult it is for one or even several baseline humans to oppose even one nova. Directive agents have top-flight technology and nearly unlimited resources, but they're still heavily outgunned. They must hide their identities even from themselves, because one telepathic nova could expose and destroy the entire organization.

The Directive has some nasty tricks up its sleeve, including new drugs that can short out quantum powers. But going toe-to-toe with even a medium-powerful nova is a battle against very long odds.

So the Directive manipulates and schemes. It bribes, blackmails and ruins reputations with truth and lies. Its agents make information their weapon.

The Directive has placed tracking beacons in every American license plate, and can tap into any phone on Earth. They have enough people and computers to watch every move of every nova, and enough skill to make sure they're never seen doing it. Even as an organization comprised almost entirely of baselines, they're dangerous.

That gives a canny GM two approaches to the Directive in their own campaigns. The first is a Directive-centered campaign; thanks to the organization's diffuse structure of independent cells, it's easy to plug in a group of player characters as a largely autonomous task force.

Players can tackle the challenge of watching hypersensitive novas, developing schemes and scams to thwart the goals of their targets. Meanwhile, the Directive's shadowy structure and the conflicting agendas of its member nations add a touch of mystery and internal intrigue. It's a fascinating campaign for players who like to live by their wits and enjoy the challenge of taking on opponents who outclass them physically and mentally.

The Directive can also be put to good use in a more typical *Aberrant* campaign. Because they use information as weapons, they're best suited for conspiracy stories -- the Directive rarely acts openly against novas, and player characters are unlikely to know they are battling the Directive unless they can trace an unflattering news story or convenient job offer back to its true source.

The Directive won't fit every ***Aberrant*** game. They're subtle antagonists, and work so far behind the scenes that it's difficult to develop entertaining stories about them. But Storytellers and players who like plenty of intrigue will find dealing with the Directive very satisfying.

-- Chris Aylott

Cover by Richard Pace

"I've got a story ain't got no moral,
Let the bad guy win every once in a while."
-- Billy Preston, "Will It Go Round"

Evil is a tricky topic, even for the most talented of writers. Just ask John Milton. He set out in *Paradise Lost* to make Satan the villain of the piece. In the first three books of that daunting work, he shows how the fallen Morningstar mistakes his former employer for a mundane ruler, then declares war on Him. Of course Satan blows it, from a theological perspective, the moment he tries to limit what God is (you can't limit the illimitable), but Old Scratch, with his mammoth ego, never quite catches on that he is warring against a force that is beyond war.

Fast-forward a few centuries and you'll find college students everywhere penning term papers about Satan's character in *Paradise Lost*. But these budding exegetes don't identify him as a villain. In fact, there's a sizeable population of students and scholars alike who claim that Satan wasn't the bad guy of *Paradise Lost* at all. He was the prototypical Romantic rebel, the first to flip a big, red, claw-tipped bird to the forces of Authority.

No doubt stodgy old Milton would find these plaudits for his villain a bit disconcerting, especially if he hadn't intended to make his bad guy so attractive. But then the fictional agents of Evil often come across as more compelling than their Good-aligned counterparts. They are, after all, free to follow the demands of their egos rather than a moral code that distinguishes between the acceptable and the unacceptable. This makes them unpredictable and the prime source of conflict for stories of all sorts.

Little wonder, then, that a book of bad guys finally found a place on the *GURPS* release schedule. The 50-plus villains presented in this collection are both springboards for myriad nights of gaming and an entertaining read in and of themselves. They represent threats from a large spectrum of settings, from *Celtic Myth* to *Space*, *Fantasy* to *Black Ops*, and an equally wide variety of archetypes. That's how the book is organized, into eight villainous archetypes: sneaks and weasels; monomaniacs; reasonable madmen; forces of chaos; noble thieves and ignoble cops; Jekyll & Hydes; masterminds; and groups.

Of course slotting types of evil behavior into such neat little compartments is a bit like Milton's Satan trying to figure out exactly what sort of plate armor God would wear in a battle, but it's necessary for organizing a book like this. It's a bit comforting, too. If you can slap a simple clinical label onto a behavior you see as threatening or disturbing, you're just a bit more at ease writing about it. (The monster you see isn't nearly as frightening as the one you can't, as the *Blair Witch* filmmakers proved so profitably last summer.) And there *is* an atmosphere of unease inherent in writing about characters that murder, torture, or generally mistreat those around them.

The prevalence of humor in depictions of the villainous and the
horrific is yet another way for writers (and readers) to confront evil.
GURPS Villains does have its share of humorous bad guys, but the
laughter they elicit often covers an uncomfortable gritting of teeth.
The concept of a physician who conducts often-lethal experiments on his patients is a bit easier to deal with if that
doctor happens to be a rabbit. (Cue the Monty Python accent: "Just look at the bones!")

The characters in *GURPS Villains* were penned by writers from around the globe -- the United States, England,
Australia, Norway, Brazil, Croatia, and Denmark. Oddly enough, the ne'er-do-wells submitted by these far-flung
designers often demonstrate the pervasiveness of certain villain stereotypes. Criminal masterminds, for example, tend
to be identifiably ethnic. The characters submitted as Jekyll & Hydes, villains that seem fair but are actually
monstrous, were mostly women -- even those submitted by female authors.

I'll leave it up to the sociologists and cultural critics amongst you to hammer out an explanation as to why those
stereotypes linger. For the purposes of a *GURPS* supplement, however, it's most important to note that the characters
submitted by our globe-spanning "Agents of Infamy" make for great gaming. There is, I hope, something in the book
to whet most appetites for mayhem. Our villains are a flexible lot, too. Many of their write-ups offer variation notes,
which should allow GMs to transport the character from his base setting to a different campaign, as well as detailed
adventure seeds for working the bad guy into an existing storyline. And every entry is, at base, the embodiment of a
great idea.

The Group below, which was excluded from the printed book only because of their creator's commitments elsewhere,
is a fine example of a clever idea manifested in a form that could be translated to any setting with little effort.

The Exploding Hunchbacks

Base Setting: Victorian/Steampunk

*"They were hunchbacks, every man-jack of 'em. They had on thick
brown overcoats and bowler hats jammed down to their eyes. Seeing me,
they muttered frantically to each other before scurrying off with a
waddling gait, puffing and wheezing. I easily caught one and laid my
hand on his shoulder, informing him of his arrest. Face red and dripping*

Arturo Vatteroni (185 points)

Age 27; 5' 10"; 180 lbs.; a handsome young
Italian with blue eyes and black, wavy hair.

with sweat, he turned and smiled a little smile. Then he exploded. I was thrown flat by the blast, but miraculously not injured at all. All we recovered of the blackguard were a few tattered pieces of his overcoat."
-- Constable Peter Jacobs, London, 1886

Doctor Ekhart Lump was already a noted scientist and pacifist with several patents to his name when he came to England in 1885, seeking financial backing to create and manufacture a new lighter-than-air gas. His boyish enthusiasm, incredible charisma, and impressive demonstrations convinced a consortium of British financiers to back his latest project. Spending their money quickly and lavishly, Lump soon had his new gas, which he proudly named Lumpium.

What the good doctor had failed to inform his backers was that he had no intention of allowing his work to be used in the transport of coal or, worse still, to power airships intended for war. No, the manufacture of Lumpium was the final step in a larger project toward which all of Lump's patents had been but stepping stones: the construction of a utopian sky city.

With his backers hounding him for results or at least reports, Doctor Lump set about recruiting men capable of constructing his city, men who could work under the dangerous and daunting conditions the job would require. He met with trapeze artists and acrobats from all over Europe, as well as amateur hot air balloonists and cat burglars. Those who shared pacifist philosophy were hired immediately. He converted a few others to his cause through his immense charisma. Lump had only recruited about 25 men when the backers finally lost patience and ended his funding. They also started legal proceedings to take control of all of the doctor's patents, something their agreement, which Lump obviously hadn't read carefully enough, paved the way for them to do.

Lump saved the backers the trouble of a lengthy court battle by dying shortly after his project had been terminated. The men he had recruited, however, decided not to let his dream die with him.

Before the financiers could find all of Lump's laboratories or confiscate his equipment, the doctor's recruits fitted a small steamer with huge balloons filled with Lumpium and reworked its propellers into ungainly aerial screws. They named the airship *Himmelstadt*, "Sky City," and took to the clouds with enough hardware to generate Lumpium. They also took plans for several inventions Doctor Lump had not shared with the world. Among the blueprints and drawings were detailed instructions for constructing a personal flying device, a one-man balloon suit. Before long, the entire crew of the *Himmelstadt* had been outfitted with these balloons and a few other special inventions. The crew dubbed themselves the Aeronauts, though the press would soon label the group with a less romantic name: the Exploding Hunchbacks.

Properly outfitted, the acrobats and balloonists began conducting raids to regain Lump's equipment and exact additional funds from the financiers who, to their minds, killed their founding genius. Striking only at night, the crew descended from balloon-borne lifeboats mounted with motorized winches. After achieving their objective, they returned to

ST 11 [10], **DX** 15 [60], **IQ** 10 [0], **HT** 11 [10]
Basic Speed 6, Move 5
Dodge 5, Parry 10 (Brawling)

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5]; Acute Hearing +1 [2]; Ally Group (Pacifist sympathizers, medium-sized group, 12-) [40]; Ambidextrous [10]; Collected [5]; Contacts (Crime reporter, skill 15, available 12-, completely reliable) [12]; Contacts (Whitehall bureaucrat, skill 15, available 12-, usually reliable) [8]; Double Jointed [5]; High Technology (+1 TL) [20]; Night Vision [10].
Disadvantages: Cannot Kill [-15]; Distractable [-1]; Impulsiveness [-10]; Nosy [-1]; Secret (Criminal activity) [-20]; Sense of Duty (To Hunchbacks) [-10]; Vow (To uphold Doctor Lump's ideals while creating a Sky City) [-10].
Quirks: Hates soup and voices that opinion often; Peeks in windows he passes; Mouth breather; Unruly hair. [-4]
Skills: Acrobatics-17^ [16]; Airshipman/TL6 (Balloon Vessels)-10 [4]; Blackjack-18^ [8]; Brawling-15^ [1]; Climbing-19**^ [4]; Escape-19**^ [4]; First Aid/TL5-10 [1]; Lasso-16^ [4]; Lockpicking/TL5-10 [2]; Navigation/TL5-13* [4]; Stealth-15^ [2]; Swimming-15^ [1]; Throwing-15^ [4]; Wrestling-14^ [1].

* Includes +3 for Absolute Direction.
** Includes +3 for Double Jointed.
^ Skill at -2 when wearing balloon suit.

Languages: Italian (Native) 12 [2]; English 10 [1].
Maneuvers: Aerial Acrobatics 15^ [0].
Equipment: Full Hunchback suit and hat; 3/8 rope, 20 yards; anchor grapnel; first aid kit; mallet; four pitons; and knife. (In full suit, Arturo carries around 40 lbs. of equipment, and suffers Light Encumbrance.)

Arturo "Arty" Vatteroni grew up traveling the dusty back roads of southern Europe with his circus family, performing for poor peasants, eating thin soup, and being hounded by police. For him, life with the Aeronauts (he refuses to adopt the name given the gang by the press) is a fabulous adventure full of thrills and comradeship. He

the sky via these winches or their own balloons (in which case they signaled with flares for lifeboats to collect them).

The Exploding Hunchbacks -- the name given to these raiders by the London press -- is a misnomer. When on the ground, the raiders conceal their deflated balloon suits under heavy coats, which give them the appearance of hunchbacks. If cornered, a gang member will deploy his hidden balloon by pulling a cord. This releases the ingredients for the Lumpium gas, which then fills the balloon and propels him upward at great speed. The sound of the "explosion" is the balloon expanding with violent force. It lifts its user so swiftly that a hapless witnesses would believe the man has exploded, particularly since the concealing overcoat is often left shredded. To further this illusion, some of the Hunchbacks carry flash powder. A few jokers even carry hunks of raw meat, which are certain to distract any by-standers to an escape.

believes they can achieve all their goals and live like kings in the sky, occasionally swooping down to grab whatever they desire (from those who deserve to be robbed, of course). He hopes someone will be able to create a lighter balloon suit, as he finds its weight almost unbearable. He is secretly awed by sprawling, cosmopolitan London, and finds it hard not to be distracted by its sites.

Motivations

The Hunchbacks are dedicated to fulfilling Doctor Lump's dream: the creation of pacifist human cities in the stratosphere. They steal whatever they need to further this goal and to keep the *Himmelstadt* operating. Their main targets are the financiers who backed Lump's final experiments, though their secondary victims might come from the military or those industries that benefit directly from warfare.

The Hunchbacks will not kill and will not harm innocents, though they find no problem in kidnapping, blackmailing, or outright thievery, so long as the victims meet under their definition of "deserving."

Resources

The *Himmelstadt* is well-stocked with necessities, as well as scientific devices of all sorts. Police suspect that the Hunchbacks have a hideout on the ground somewhere, though this has yet to be discovered. The group undoubtedly benefits from mid-level contacts in the press and perhaps even the government, who tip off the raiders to plans for their capture; these contacts share the gang's pacifist ideals.

The Hunchbacks' main advantage is the equipment left to them by Doctor Lump, which earns them a High Technology advantage (+1 TL).

The Balloon Suit: Each Hunchback wears the "balloon suit" made up of a stiff leather vest with straps running between the legs. Upon this is mounted the "hump," a tightly packed rubber balloon fitted to two small gas flasks worn at the lower back. By pulling a concealed cord, the Hunchback opens a valve that mixes the various chemicals to create Lumpium gas. This inflates the balloon with a tremendous slap of unfurling canvas, ripping his coat apart.

The balloon suit covers locations 9-10 and 17-18. It has PD 3 and DR 3. The suit, gas tanks, and uninflated balloon weigh a total of 28 lbs. On top of its weight, the ungainly suit gives a -2 modifier to all physical skills.

Attacks from the back that strike location 10 will hit the gas flasks (PD 2, DR 2). Penetration releases the gas, which makes everyone within five yards speak in a high-pitched voice for the next 10 minutes. A clever adversary may grab the valve topping the flasks, (providing he knows about it) with a successful Grapple, and in his next turn, inflate the balloon. This can be especially effective when battling a Hunchback indoors and beneath trees or balconies, as he will likely be trapped when his balloon inflates.

Anyone directly behind the Hunchback or trying to grapple him when the cord is pulled is subject to a forceful slam (ST 18) from the deploying balloon. If the victim avoids knockback, he can maintain a hold on the Hunchback. This, however, may be a very bad idea. The Hunchbacks will not knowingly kill anyone, but they are not above dropping an adversary from a great enough height to make him regret the encounter.

The Hat: Each Hunchback also wears a leather-reinforced bowler (loc. 3-4, PD 2, DR 2, weight 3 lbs.). The hat is secured with a strap and conceals a magnesium flare and dark fold-down goggles. By pulling a ring hidden in the brim, the Hunchback releases the flare and deploys the goggles, which cover his eyes as the magnesium flare lights. The flare burns brightly for five minutes, before petering out.

The flare is normally used to signal an aerial pick-up by a lifeboat, but the Hunchbacks have found that it can temporarily blind or discomfort attackers as per the effects of the Flash spell (p. B163), buying the Hunchback time to run or deploy his balloon. A Hunchback will not use his flare in this fashion lightly; since mission members carry no spares, he can expect to spend an uncomfortable night high in the sky, blowing his whistle to attract the collection lifeboat.

Other equipment: For missions, Hunchbacks wear boots with retractable claws (+1 to climb stone surfaces) and sport altimeters disguised as fob watches. They also carry a whistle, a belt winch, and a rope coiled around the waist with a collapsible grapnel anchor. Two members of each team also carry lockpicks, crowbars, and slings for combined lifting of strongboxes or kidnap victims.

Organization

The crew of the *Himmelstadt* consists of between 20 and 30 members at any one time. All are trained acrobats and burglars. The captaincy rotates, with each crewman serving a week-long term. Each five-man mission team is headed by a "bosun." As with the captaincy, this position rotates between off-ship assignments.

A loosely organized group of between 10 to 15 pacifist sympathizers provide land-based support for the Hunchbacks. In times of crisis they offer hideouts throughout London. More typically, they buy supplies and scout targets for raids. A few members of this Ally Group are relatives of men serving aboard the *Himmelstadt*; others simply share Lump's utopian vision.

Encountered

The *Himmelstadt* spends the days floating, disguised, in a lake remote from London. Under cover of darkness (and often fog or low clouds, as well), the ship lifts off and flies toward the city. Its four lifeboats, fitted with small aerial screws and powerful winches, deliver the Hunchbacks to the ground via ropes and later collect them after the mission has been completed. White wicker shields can be erected around the ship to create an admittedly unconvincing artificial cloud, though her crew prefers real clouds or fog to hide their movements.

Aware that their cumbersome equipment makes them vulnerable, the raiding parties make every effort to achieve surprise and create chaotic diversions. The Hunchbacks themselves will enter an area as stealthily as possible. To cover their movements, they rely upon other crewmen stationed on lifeboats, here used as mobile balloon platforms, whose job it is to spray smoke or irritant gas upon adversaries. They also dismay potential opposition to their ground force with flashing lights, fireworks, or thousands of large marbles dropped from the air. The lifeboats have winches capable of ripping a door off its hinges or lifting a hansom cabs into the air.

If cornered on the ground, a Hunchback will attempt to escape by inflating his balloon. Should he have the opportunity to slip away rather than use his balloon, he will run, often heading for a pre-arranged safe house or isolated meeting place.

The Hunchbacks have one pressing problem: money. Their sense of justice demands the Hunchbacks steal only from deserving victims -- particularly the financiers who took advantage of Doctor Lump (to their way of thinking, anyway). Over time, however, the bankers and their cohorts have increased the guards around themselves and their property. This has caused the Hunchbacks to widen their definition of "just victim" to include industrialists and investors allied closely to the financiers, as well as businesses and businessmen who make their fortunes by creating implements of war.

Player characters with pacifist leanings might be contacted by one of the Hunchbacks' allies. Those with ties to the

British military-industrial complex or the London financial district might find themselves employed by the would-be targets of the Hunchbacks.

Because of their pacifist tendencies, the Exploding Hunchbacks are far from the worst of criminal conspiracies, and may even make common cause with the PCs against some greater peril. An adventuring group might even join the gang, donning the balloon suit for the glory of Scientific Progress. However, should the secret of the Exploding Hunchbacks be revealed, deadly conflict would surely ensue. Agents of the Great Powers, as well as powerful and nasty archvillains, would stop at nothing to seize the formula for a stable and useful gas like Lumpium.

Variations

The Hunchbacks can be transferred to most settings rather easily. Wherever they appear, they should maintain their High Technology advantage, which will be put into use only in the name of peace or some other noble cause. In a futuristic setting, the Hunchbacks might possess some sort of special anti-grav devices or rocket packs they keep hidden beneath bulging space suits. In a *Fantasy* campaign, the source of their flight would be magical or alchemical.

Normalcy and Continuity

Punchline to an old joke:

The first prisoner decides to give it a try, so he shouts out: "Number TWELVE!" Silence. He tries again: "Number TWELVE!" Again, silence.

The second prisoner clears his throat and says, "Some people can't tell a joke."

As I sit tied to the back of a chicken truck, working my way down I-75 from Atlanta back to Florida and feeling lucky to have escaped the Prison Spa, I have to ask:

How many people don't have the foggiest idea what's going on?

As best I can tell looking at the stats, we've added about 50 new people last couple of weeks. (Hi, everyone!) These are folks who, in all likelihood, don't have any clue what has gone before; with my column alone, they don't know about the *Shadis* Story, the Torg Story, the Dungeon of Legos, or my recent kidnapping by cultists. A heavily-linked Suppressed Transmission (like this week's) could send a would-be reader through a black hole of previous columns from which there may be no escape.

In game books, like soap operas, an adherence to continuity can cause problems for those who would want to jump into the middle of an unfamiliar story or setting. Even in a relatively static world, if events are referred to from other books but not retold in other books (like some of FASA's games seem to be), then the continuity that makes a game world feel rich can scare new players away.

Finally, in a gaming group that has members join and leave, significant items of continuity that have a bearing on the campaign may be unknown to the newbies. ("What do you mean you all started a war with the orcs?!? Why didn't someone tell me before I went to Orctown?!?") Even when this lack of knowledge isn't fatal, it can still make the new folks feel left out if they are unfamiliar with the communal history of the older members of the group.

But even with these pitfalls, continuity can be a powerful thing, at least within the gaming sessions themselves. When the innkeeper points and says, "Aren't you the ones who defeated that elder wyrm last year?"; when the troubadour met in the first session has gained popularity with a song about the events in that story; when the villain shows up with not just *any* magic sword, but the sword lost in the catacombs of Frost seven adventures ago. . . when elements of the past come back to have real, significant meaning, *that* makes the entire woven tapestry of the story feel more interesting.

Sure, it's easy to overdo continuity. Like the television character who uses that oh-so-funny catch phrase one time too many, having elements of the past come back too often is unrealistic in most campaigns (barring some genres like slapstick anime or elements like weirdness magnet), and can be distracting. And, judging by some comments in my inbox and over in the newsgroups, some people didn't like or understand my attempts at a bit of continuity over the past month. But I also got a bunch of comments from folks who seemed amused, and one person who wondered how good an issue he would get if Steve Jackson himself was spirited away by cultists. (Of course, having met him at DragonCon last weekend, all I can say is that Steve's too cool to be taken unawares, unlike me. . .)

Regardless, I have returned, the cultists are in disarray, and all is right with the world.

Until my next experiment.

* * *

All right, gang, I've always tried to be honest with you.

This column is shorter than usual, and most of it was written at DragonCon proper.

Unfortunately, between a death in the family, the stresses of moving at the end of this month, and going out of town three times this month (when the last time I've been out of town was July 4th of last year), I don't have the time or the mental energies necessary to give "continuity" the space it deserves. Rest assured that I will come back to this topic, because I think it's neat.

In the interim, I am currently busier and more stressed than I have at any point in recent memory; I apologize in advance, but please don't expect immediate replies to e-mails or submissions. "That which doesn't kill me makes me strAAAAAA!!!! <THUM THUM>" said my chum Nietzsche before he was hit by a bus, and it's true. So hopefully I'll survive July and all will be right with the world. But not right now.

Thanks for understanding, and thanks again, all of you, for reading.

By the by. . . if anyone happens to be at Universal Studios in Orlando, Florida, this weekend, I'll be helping to organize the World Yo-Yo Competition. Stop by and say hello, if you'd like.

Oh. . .

And <ahem> Number SIX!

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: *Mystery Science Theatre 3000*, "I Was a Teenage Werewolf" (a **cult** series!)

(Four stars) "They asked St. Germain's manservant if his master was truly a thousand years old, as it was rumoured he had claimed.

" 'How would I know?' the man replied. 'I have only been in the master's employ for three hundred years.' "

by Matthew Rossi

Art by [Keith Johnson](#)

One way to play with alternate timelines is to use them in a straightforward *Infinite Worlds*-style game, such as provided in **GURPS Time Travel** and its stylistic brethren (**Doctor Who**, **Champions in 3D**) with the PC's heading from world to world. This can be quite enjoyable. Tripping from reality to reality to battle the forces of Centrum, or fallen Time Lords, or the evil forces of said timeline (racist Confederate Security Agency goons, foul Waffen-SS Mecha troopers, you name it) can be sufficiently ripping for any campaign.

However, another way to use the alternate timeline is to base it around the PC's. This doesn't mean that the changes have to be caused by them; it just means that the way to approach the alternation can be driven by their interaction with it *as a part of it.* In other words, have them play the alternate timeline's version of themselves, or other natives to it, rather than as outsiders. While this could work in any kind of game, it works best in highly cinematic ones.

One way to look at this is to consider such books as Phillip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* or the DC Comic's imprint known as *Elseworlds*. Rather than have the PC's going from world to world and thereby somewhat blunting the impact of the experience, the occasional use of an alternate timeline in an ongoing campaign can serve to highlight some themes of the character's personas. Your **Mage: The Ascension** Virtual Adept who's a bit of a technochauvinist may learn something about herself if, for one session, you explore what she would have been like in a world without the Traditions, where technology fully developed as a dehumanizing force and had no room for creativity.

Such session can be played as dream sequences, as the effects of a successful temporal intervention, as an actual alternate timeline that the PC's may travel to later, or as a "bit of undigested beef." It really isn't important.

Some ground rules for playing an alternate interlude should always be set. These may vary from game to game, but some could be as follows:

- Don't penalize the PC's for the player's ignorance. If throwing a character into a world where the south won the Civil War, then do so in such a way that the PC can catch on to the alternation. Unless, of course, the point is to do exactly that by having the world be so bleak and unrelenting that by the end of the experience the PC's are grateful for the normal milleu.
  Example: In a **GURPS Supers** game, the PCs have a recurring enemy with seemingly sympathetic goals and a

great deal of rhetorical flourish, and they are beginning to wonder why they should oppose him. The next session, the GM shows them why; they spend a game session as renegades in a world shaped by his message, and realize that he must be stopped.

- Whether or not the PCs play alternate versions of themselves or natives to the alternative timelines (an especially tempting option if the alternate timeline is one where the PC's are somehow the villains) be sure that they are allowed to really be the center of the story. It doesn't matter if they themselves are the prime movers of the reality in question, so long as focus of the particular story you are all telling is theirs. After all, in any timeline, there are an almost infinite number of tales to be told.
  Example: An alternation based around the successful conquest of the Americas by Celtic Warbands would seem to have very little direct effect on the players of a cliffhanger-style campaign. However, by using it to highlight a particular theme (the threat of over-reckless behavior on a grand scale, say) it can be a very effective one-shot that could get the players thinking.

- Think about elements of the campaign as it has been to date; often one single moment in the game can be played with, and used as fodder towards an entirely different experience than established. This is the "What if?" factor.
  Example: Once, during a battle on top of the main villain's castle, one of the heroes nearly died while stopping the bio- mimetic plague cannon. What if he *had* died, and the cannon had fired? Imagine the alternative; a bedraggled cadre of the remaining PC's and possibly even a few of their own enemies, allied for the common (yet basically hopeless) task of curing the disease and stopping the villain from profiting from his actions. Such a game could get the PC's thinking about their significance as well as the true nature of some of their enemies.

Remember that the alternative timeline is not the exclusive province of time travel games, and you'll be fine.

Pyramid Pick

Reverse Dungeon

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by John D. Rateliff and Bruce R. Cordell

95 pages; $17.95

"When kids play cops and robbers (or in the old days, cowboys and Indians) there are always some who want to play the robbers (and Indians)."
-- *Reverse Dungeon*; Appendix, pg. 89

This is not your normal adventure. Instead of playing a stalwart group of adventurers, valiantly fighting the forces of darkness, the players take on the challenge of playing those forces and deciding for themselves if they are truly that dark.

Reverse Dungeon is a well thought-out scenario that challenges players to step away from their normal ideas and take a significantly different view of the world around them. It places them in control of a dungeon's monsters. Starting with a small tribe of Goblins, progressing through a menagerie of monsters, and ending with the chance to delve into the diabolic minds of the undead.

John Rateliff and Bruce Cordell present an interesting role-playing challenge to both player and DM. Both their Introduction and Appendix: Playing the Bad Guys caution and guide the readers to the realization that this is a chance to extend beyond any normal role-playing experience. The Appendix delves into the idea that some monsters, the Goblins in particular, may not be "evil" just misunderstood. They're just trying to make their own way in the world and view the occasional adventuring party as an evil force in their lives. It also gives equal voice to the idea that the bad guys can be pure evil, but that doesn't mean they don't have feelings, or intelligence.

Reverse Dungeon is divided into three sections of the dungeon presented. Each section stands on its own and has a full description of the creatures the players will be assigned, maps of the area, and multiple scenarios for the DM's eyes-only. Each scenario presents a different challenge for the players to pit their monster characters against. Scenarios can also be easily modified so they may carry over to the next section as the DM sees fit.

The first section deals with a small tribe of Goblins. It includes a description of Goblin life, including hierarchy, daily activities, and an explanation of the surrounding area. The DM may allow the players to play up to three normal Goblin warriors in order to simulate the Goblins knack for working together. They may also play a Goblin Shaman or Witchdoctor as the DM allows. Normal Goblin warriors, the PCs, may be given the chance to prove themselves as leaders and advance in the hierarchy as the game progresses. The scenarios in this section start with raids from a Goblin-hunting party of adventurers and can lead to a Goblin attack on the nearby town to stop them.

The second section of the dungeon is comprised of the remains of a powerful wizard's collection of monsters and artifacts. The players are presented a wide variety of monsters to play, including a Beholder, Illithid, and Troll to name a few. Each is still under the wizard's geas to protect his treasures and each has its own treasure to guard. This section is great for those players who felt a little under powered or disadvantaged in the first section. The scenarios, however, are appropriately balanced and in many cases, cunning and guile are much more successful than all the power that the players' monsters can muster.

Finally, the third section is dedicated to the lowest levels of the dungeon, which is inhabited by the former owner, now a lich, and his undead and demonic companions. It is here where the players will be given the greatest opportunity to

get into the evil mind and be presented with their largest challenges. Scenarios here include a raid from the local monastery, its repercussions in the dungeon, and the possibility for a raid to destroy the monastery itself.

One of the more unique ideas touched upon in **Reverse Dungeon** is the concept of continuing adventures. While it would be a challenge to make most of the monsters into an adventuring character, possibilities for expanding the dungeon-centered campaign are presented at the end of the book.

For all of its organization, well though out scenarios, and unique view on the game, **Reverse Dungeon** is not for novice role-players or DMs. The emphasis on role-playing throughout the adventure is without a doubt one of the best efforts produced for any game in a long time. This adventure can, however, be quite intimidating the first time it is picked up. Reverse Dungeon was well received in my small gaming community and looked upon as something that could be the proverbial breath of fresh air to a group that has found itself playing the same old characters over and over again. A final warning for those brave enough to face the **Reverse Dungeon**; be careful that the players don't enjoy playing the "bad guys" too much.

-- Sean Forbes

Pyramid Pick

Aladdin's Dragons

Published by [Rio Grande Games](#)

Created by Richard Breese

Board game for 3-5 players

Aladdin's Dragons is an excellent board game with a rich setting. As is typical for Rio Grande Games, the game is beautiful: lush color board, handsome plexiglass treasure pieces, sturdy colorful chits and cards, stand-up screens to hide your chits and treasures. All are easy to use and read. This helps set the mood of the game, which takes place in the Arabian Nights era, of course.

Each player in the game has assembled a team of eight adventurers (with a chance to recruit more). There are treasures available to those bold enough to dare the dragons' caves where they can be found. Once you have the treasures, you have to gain priveleges to allow you to barter them for magic artifacts in the Caliph's well-guarded palace. The winner is the one who has the most artifacts at the end of the game.

The board has 15 spaces, in three rows. The bottom row consists of five dragon caves. Each turn, a number of treasures is distributed in the five caves as shown on a randomly drawn card. There are five types of treasure, but not all will be found in any given turn.

The middle row has only four spaces, those of the city streets. Here you can vie with your fellow players for magic spells, treasure-swapping, etc.

The top row has up to six spaces: a guard room and one palace room for each player in the game. In each palace room can be found an artifact -- whoever bids the most treasure in each room gets the artifact in that room.

The game is played in two phases: the chit-placing phase, and the room-resolution phase. In the chit-placing phase, each player, starting with the first player, places one of their eight adventurer chits face down in any of the 15 spaces on the board. When all five have placed a chit, one at a time, they place their second chits, and so on. It's best to be last player during the chit-placing phase: you get to see where others are concentrating their forces before having to commit yours.

Each chit has a number, from 1-9 (you don't start with a 3-chit). You can, over the eight rounds of placing chits, place more than one in a given space, if you wish. But you can already see: eight chits over 15 rooms means you'll have to decide which rooms to concentrate on, and which to ignore in a given turn.

Once all chits are placed, the chits are revealed, one room at a time. You start with the leftmost dragon cave, and then go across the whole bottom row. Then you resolve the middle and top rows, one room at a time in order.

To resolve a space, reveal all the chits in that space. Whichever player has the highest total printed on his adventurer chits in the space wins the space. For example, if I put two chits into the first dragon cave, my 4 and my 6, I win if you only put your single 9-chit there. However, in some spaces, the second and even third or fourth place player can win something -- this is especially true in the dragon caves, where there may be more than one treasure in a cave.

Ties are won by the first player, or the player closest to the first player's left. Thus it's good to be first player in the room-resolution phase, a nice balance to the chit-placing phase.

In the street spaces, you can win Magic Spell cards, the right to use two artifacts, the right to swap one treasure for three, or the right to be first player.

There are 21 different spells, one of each, and they can be cast at any time by use of your Magic Lamp artifact, which all players start with. They range from fairly powerful to fairly mild in effect, but are always fun and make the game different each time.

Normally you may only use one artifact each turn. Everyone starts with a Magic Lamp (but no spell cards to cast -- you have to win those). Available in the palace are five other types of artifacts: a flying carpet (which contains the missing "3" adventurer chit), a counterspell token, a key to bypass the palace guards, a Double (to double an adventurer when needed), and a scroll which acts as a tiebreaker at the end of the game.

There are ten palace guards, ranging in value from 1-10. Each turn they are randomly mixed, and one is selected for the turn, still face down. When the room is resolved, turn the palace guard face up. Your adventurer must be the same value or higher in order to get into the palace rooms. If you're low, you can bribe the guard with treasure for the difference -- or use your key artifact.

Each palace space has a number of artifacts, with only the top one face up, available in a given turn. The player who has the highest value in adventurer chits in the room wins the right to buy the artifact. *But . . .* you have to pay a number of treasures equal to the value of your winning chits! Each chit value must be all the same type of treasure. So if you win with a 2- and a 4-chit, you must pay four of one type of treasure and two of a different type. If you don't have the right amount of treasure, the second-place winner in the room may buy an artifact at their own chit level.

That's a game turn. Continue until all artifacts have been collected (usually six or seven turns), at which point the game winner is the player with the most artifacts. The most scrolls break ties.

Each game is very different, and the game plays well with three, four, or five players. It's not hard to master the mechanics, but it's always a challenge to know where to place which adventurer chit. This is an excellent game that plunges you into an interesting, colorful world of difficult -- but rewarding! -- decisions.

-- Steffan O'Sullivan

Pyramid Review

Blood & Silk (for Kindred of the East and Vampire: The Dark Ages)

Published by White Wolf Publishing

Written by Bruce Baugh, Geoffrey C. Grabowski, Ellen P. Kiley & James Kiley

176 pages, $21.95

Here's a book that's got "tough to use" written all over it.

First off, it's a supplement for *Kindred of the East* and *Vampire: The Dark Ages*. No big whoop, except that KotE is a supplement for Vampire: The Masquerade.

This isn't really a huge detraction from the utility of the gamebook. The *V:tDA* rules book combined with the *KotE* contain most of the info you'd need to run a game of B&S. There's at least one missing rule; neither *Kindred of the East* nor *Vampire: The Dark Ages* contains the rules for Fame. Admittedly, a minor quibble, but if you're gonna nit pick, you may as well grab something and hang onto it.

So, in order to use *Blood & Silk* you'll need *Kindred of the East* and one of the main rulebooks (*Dark Ages* or *Masquerade*). Since most users of the game (nay, all?) will have *KotE*, and thus a *Vampire* rulebook, this shouldn't be a problem. The cover does tell us that it is a sourcebook for *KotE* and *V: tDA*, but should have mentioned you'd need them both on the back cover, say, rather than in the "How to Use This Book" section. Aside from having to wing the rules for Fame, however, *Dark Ages* should give you all the rules you need.

The book describes the setting of *Kindred of the East* in 1197, when the Middle Kingdom is on the brink of the fifth age. (As opposed to the modern day, which is the cusp of the sixth age. . . that is a bad thing.)

The first chapter of the book spends its time describing Asia in 1197. From Song dynasty China to Japan and Korea, we're taken across the east from one end to the other. The pieces are written in character, which is always a very interesting way to fill you in on the feel of a setting. The narrators are a number of Kuei-Jin (Eastern vampire) and a were-rat.

The settings are interestingly described; items of interest to the role-player mindset are highlighted in each section. The sections that describe the Vampiric courts each have a 'destiny' note, saying what fates will befall them in the official setting.

Following the travelogue, we're given info on how to create eastern Kindred in the era described by *Blood & Silk*. It's quite a lot of information, but it's presented in a fashion that's very easy to absorb and interesting to read.

The five central Dharmas are the philosophies the Kuei-Jin use to reach enlightenment. Each of them represents a focus on one of the four aspects of the soul or balance between them. Each of them is described, highlighting the differences between the modern day versions and the ones from ancient times.

The character creation section fills readers in on the differences between unlife in modern days and the dawn of the fifth age. The Shintai arts are different, and some of the optional disciplines are either non-existent or limited in their use.

Also presented, in a very useful fashion, are sample concepts for character types. They list off some lives the characters can have, the hells they may visit, and the dharmas they would be likely to follow upon their return. Thankfully, they authors didn't rob us of our Samurai. The sample aspects are also present in a very interesting fashion, with Devout and Dishonest Priests and high-ranking and low-ranking bureaucrats.

There are new P'o aspects (the P'o is the dark side of a Kuei Jin). The ancient P'o weren't quite as savage as their modern counterparts. Whereas I can see a couple of modern Kuei Jin getting quite savage when they enter Shadow Soul, letting their barbarian and bandit souls loose, the only image that comes to mind from loosed Eunuch and Artist P'o is a particularly nasty slap-fight.

Another section that's particularly interesting is several pages that describe rolls that could be made in the course of normal life and unlife. There are descriptions of arranging marriages, taking the imperial exams, and describing situations to keep all involved parties from losing face. These small paragraphs help describe the setting, adding flavour and texture and at the same time offering plot hooks.

The most uneven section of the book comes at the end, in something mostly unrelated to the main gist of the book. The section on "Barbarians and Shen" is about the related beasties and other folk who lurk in The Mysterious East. The section on Hengeyokai, in particular, is lacking. What we're given are a series of precis on the various lycanthropes and their basic functions; we're left in the dark on what they're actually doing in 1197. For example, it's nice to know what the duty of the Nezumi are, but how are they fulfilling it? Are there no suspicious famines to tell us about?

The info on the Hsien (eastern nature spirits/changelings) ghosts, and wizards is more useful. I particularly like the Ministry of Works, which is the Chinese bureaucracy that handles the implementation of magic. If you're a registered magician, **anything you do** is casual/coincidental magic. If you aren't registered, it's all vulgar/vain.

The info on western creatures is better. We get rules on how to integrate *Kindred into the East* (they do mention how dumb it seems to be to go East, since that can only end in decapitation). The sections on Garou, Kindred, and Mages are more interesting and useful than the ones on the Hengeyokai.

The final part of the book is the Appendix, which lists several locations, each of which would be good for running games in.

Artwise, *B&S* is good. Heck, I even like the Drew Tucker's work in this book, and normally he's not my favorite artist. The images fit well with and reinforce the setting.

Blood and Silk is a product that seems designed to appeal to me; it's set in the dark ages setting (which I liked) and details the Eastern Kindred (ditto). The utility of the game isn't very strong across game lines. I can't see anyone who doesn't want to play "*KotE* in the *Dark Ages*" getting a lot out of it, although the flavour and feel of the setting would be good for a horror game set in Imperial China/medieval Asia.

The book contains a great deal of the info necessary to run a game set in medieval Asia, and with the use of the suggested reading lists, I feel like I'd be well prepared to run a game. Most importantly, I'd like to run a game in this setting.

-- Justin Mohareb

The Hundredth Transmission: Designer's Notes

"HORATIO: It would have much amazed you.
HAMLET: Very like, very like. Stay'd it long?
HORATIO: While one with moderate haste might tell a hundred."
-- William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* I:ii:235-237

Apparently when King David got where I am, he had the same reaction: "Make a joyful noise," saith the psalmist, in the 100th Psalm. Hoo-ahh! It's been over two years now that the Transmissions have remained un-Suppressed, and the 100th Transmission is as good a place as any to reflect on what the heck I think I'm doing, and why, and how you can do it yourself. People learn to fly helicopters in less than a hundred lessons, after all; tilting worlds on their sides and smacking them into each other for entertainment purposes can't be any harder than that.

"I was able at last to persuade my companion to take my advice, though I knew from his excited manner that there was not much hope of sleep for him. Indeed, his mood was infectious, for I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem, and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last."
-- Dr. John H. Watson, in *The Adventure of the Naval Treaty*

Way back in the First Transmission, I toured through the four basic food groups of my own particular phantasia: conspiracy, secret history, horror, and alternate history. Since then, I've tried to demonstrate just what I meant by those categories in three alphabets and a Tarot deck, although I find that my best results come from blending one or two or four of them together rather than trying to distill them with any lit-crit sense of genre purity. Certainly "Six Flags Over Roswell" (the Fortieth Transmission, and still the most popular) combines conspiracy and alternate history, but there's hefty dollops of the other two in there as well. In fact, the last of the six options, in which President Taft reveals the existence of the Roswell saucer, demonstrates my firm conviction that you can have a jim-dandy "conspiracy game" without any actual conspiracy at all. I don't want to go through every one of a hundred columns piece by piece and analyze what I was (or, in some cases, wasn't) doing, but I think it's very interesting that of the top ten Transmissions in the ratings, only three of them are even "mostly pure" examples of a single Tarot suit. (Horror, Secret History, and Alternate History -- the highest-rated "mostly pure" Conspiracy column is 14th overall.)

Also in that first column, I announced my intention to write columns about "those little pieces of weirdness . . . to write sidebars around." And, despite Official Sidebar Length being no more than 340 words, most of you seem to have responded well to most of my attempts to pad them out to around five times that length. Part of that, of course, comes from the aforementioned blending: if you cover every topic from four angles, that'll bloat a sidebar handsomely. But, more importantly, it will hopefully set off further connections in you, the reader, the player, the GM. The columns are just starting points: I've always got more to say about anything; following the Reptoids, or Saint-Germain, or Lemuria through a hundred essays demonstrates that. And you are more than welcome, nay, invited, to follow your own, look this stuff up, or even make it up. This isn't a mystery religion or a Gnostic order, it's gaming advice -- raw food for you to prepare and serve. Sometimes it's a thick, juicy steak; sometimes it's just garlic for your Adventure Pizza. Sometimes the same column can be steak to one GM, garlic to another, and (as I'm occasionally reminded on the message boards) a used mustard packet to a third.

"Let us suppose that when the sun rose one morning there were 99 monkeys on Koshima Island who had learned to wash their sweet potatoes. Let's further suppose that later that morning, the hundredth monkey learned to wash potatoes. THEN IT HAPPENED! By that evening almost everyone in the tribe was washing sweet potatoes before eating them. The added energy of this hundredth monkey somehow created an ideological breakthrough! . . . Thus, when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness may be communicated from mind to mind."
-- Ken Keyes, Jr., *The Hundredth Monkey*

But I didn't just promise fat, four-dimensional sidebars about weirdness. I specifically promised columns about "the kinds of things that make me ask 'Now how can I work this into a game?'" Some people feel that, without "three enormous bookcases of obscura and eliptony" (as I said a little over two years ago) at their disposal, they can't work any of my foolishness into a game. That's easily disproved: I've been working this stuff into games since 1981, when I

only had four feet of obscura and eliptony jammed under a card table. Now I have six bookcases of the stuff, and it doesn't mean my games are twice as good as they were two years ago. A big palette is nice, of course, but Picasso revolutionized art using only the color blue.

• **Start With High Concept:** Just like in the movies. "What if the Voodoo Loa lived on Mars?" "What if *The Mummy* met *The Three Musketeers?*" "It's like the Woodstock Nation crossed with Namor the Sub-Mariner crossed with *GURPS Technomancer.*" Pretend you're going to sell it to Hollywood producers for a million dollars, rather than to *Pyramid* for three cents a word. Get all jazzed up on it, riff on the concepts, brainstorm a screen full of random typing. Fall in love with it. You do, after all, have to sell it to yourself, and to your players.

• **Do The Reading:** But where do you get your ideas? Where don't you? There's whole TV shows and comic books and gaming supplements out there that do nothing but beg you to rip them off for your players, run them through the idea mill a couple of times ("It's just like *The X-Files,* only in the Old West." "It's just like *Planetary,* only they excavate histories that never were." "It's just like *GURPS Black Ops,* only in Elizabethan England."), and make them your own. For the basic "spice rack" of silliness to add to them, there's always the Top Ten Books For High Weirdness. In emergencies, take scenario ideas out of the paper. Or the tabloids.

• **Write What You Know:** If you know bupkus about Shakespearean England, but wrote your master's thesis on cryptology, don't run a Shakespeare game, run one centered on Enigma machines and the Ultra project. If you're nuts on Egypt, make the Secret Masters Egyptian High Priests. Just because I, for example, am over the moon on medieval legendry doesn't mean you have to use my Mandeville column to run a game on medieval legends. If you know cognitive psychology backwards, invent some kind of pseudoscientific gizmo for exploring lies and delusions, and just use Mandeville as a tossed-off example. ("Project Mandeville will actually let you travel into delusional states thanks to our breakthrough in cognitive bogosity.") Trust me, any true expert on a topic knows more weird things about it than I can ever look up.

• **Involve The Players:** Get the players interested, sold, and eager. Let them co-create; if a player knows Breton faerie lore like you know California wine, have him write it up for the game, and bring it in (and you'll tie it, of course, to California wine). Once they "buy in" to the game, and take on the responsibility of co-creation with you, they'll be bound and determined to have fun or die trying. Keep them interested by linking things to character hooks; with the wildness of a Suppressed Transmission game, you can connect any two hooks or concepts or keys, through Sir Francis Bacon if necessary.

• **Be Thou Not Afraid Of Purple:** Make it marvelous; abandon irony and second-guessing. If you smirk and snigger, you're inviting the players to mock your game. That's seldom a good idea. No, let your eyes shine with holy zeal or pure demon joy, whether it's for a high-camp Alternate Reality, or for a straight-ahead commitment to exploring a genre, a theme, or even a design premise.

• **You Control the Vertical, You Control the Horizontal:** Always remember that the wild coincidences of sacred geometry or kabbalistic illumination come from the GM. You can write in coincidences, details, metaplots, or anything else without doing a lick of research if you've got an eye for the freakish and an ear for the remotely plausible. I made up Project: Banquo, for example, out of whole cloth in about two hours to make deadline because I didn't have time to research a real article.

• **Always Have At Least Two Exits:** Here's where bisociation can save you. Always have two possible explanations for everything, two ways out of the death trap, two brilliant schemes, two backup "versions" of your game in case you decide to hit it with a nova to wake people up or knock it into an area where you've suddenly hit gold, research-wise.

• **Invoke The Chandler Principle:** Raymond Chandler once wrote that, in writing a mystery, "When in doubt, always have two men with guns burst in the door." This is even better advice for the GM, especially for the GM of a wild and raucous Suppressed Transmission game. And, to make it even better still, I've transmogrified it into this guaranteed Chandler Randomizer. Simply roll a d6 three times, and slot the results into the Chandler Algorithm: "Always have two A with B burst C"

Chandler Randomizer

Die roll	A	B	C
1	Reptoids	particle-beams	out of the saucer
2	Project Rainbow technicians	a HAARP projector	the light barrier
3	Comtes de Saint-Germain	rapiers	through a mirror
4	alchemists	a coded Shakespeare text	the surly bonds of Time
5	Confederate zeppelin pilots	a stolen Templar map	across the dimensional void
6	Antarctic Space Nazis	necro-blasters	from the caves to the Hollow Earth

And last, but not least:

• **Don't Overlook Key Details:** Like, for instance, the fact that this is actually the one hundred and ninth *Suppressed Transmission* column.

by Aaron Rosenberg

Art by [Keith Johnson](#)

(Editor's note: At the time this article was written, the roleplaying industry did *seem to be in a slump; while there are some signs that slump may be over or lessening, the advice contained in this article should still be valid.*

So don't go writing with complaints about how the gaming industry is doing better or the like, please?)

* * *

Houston, we have a problem.

The gaming industry appears to be dwindling. Fewer people are playing roleplaying games, which means that fewer people are buying them. That means that fewer game companies can afford to stay in business, which means there aren't as many new games at conventions and in stores, which means that fewer people pick up exciting new games and plays. Which leads to there being fewer gamers, and a smaller hobby.

Why is that? Well, one of the reasons is simply that new people don't join games as often. It's one thing to start playing with your friends when you're a kid, hanging out after school and pulling out the dice and the character sheets. It's a different matter entirely when you're older and you don't know these people you're supposed to spend time with. A lot of would-be gamers join a group, don't feel like they fit in, don't feel welcome, and wind up quitting after only a session or two. And they never come back. Another potential gamer gone.

So what can you do?

Well, first of all, given the opportunity, invite someone new to join your group. This doesn't mean you should add someone to the ten people who already show up every Tuesday night. But gaming groups change, over time; someone finishes school and moves away, another person gets a new job and can't make the same nights anymore, yet another gets married or has a kid and has to juggle new commitments. Sooner or later, your group is going to get smaller. Rather than simply shrug and say, "oh well, guess that means more treasure for the three of us," think about bringing in someone else. Where do you find a new gamer? The most obvious place to look would be comic and game stores; most gamers in your area probably drop by the local game store from time to time, just to see what new books are out. Put up a sign there. There are also [websites](#) now that list gamers and game groups in various parts of the country; you can put up your name and location and mention that you're looking for new group members, or you can scan the boards to see if anyone in the area is looking for a place to play. The other avenue is to check amongst your friends. Some of them have listened to you talk about gaming for years now, and yet they've never tried it. So invite them. After all, you already know them, so you know you get along with them, and they may even know the rest of the group already. They just don't know anything about gaming.

Right, so let's assume you've invited someone new to join the group. What now?

Well, first off, you can try being nice to the new member. Remember what it's like for you any time you're in a similar situation; first day of classes, first day at a new job, first day in a new town or city or apartment complex. That's what they're feeling. So show a little sympathy. Say hello, chat with them a bit, try to make them feel more at home. Even if they're already friends with someone there, they still haven't been part of this gaming group before, so they're bound to feel like outsiders at first.

Also, encourage the other players to be nice to them, too. I know, it's hard to deal with a new person; you and your group have probably been gaming together for years, you know each other's habits, ignore each other's jokes, have memorized each other's pizza and soda preferences. Games are a chance to let your hair down (for those of you who work in corporate America, this may be literally true, since you might have to keep your long hair tucked away during work hours) -- you get to unwind, relax, and hang out with people you know and are comfortable with. It's often a chance to show a side of yourself that you normally keep hidden, such as the romantic soul in you that only gets expressed in the persona of your lovesick young bard. Then, into this comfortable environment comes a complete stranger, intruding and making you uncomfortable.

Sure, it's tough to relax again and accept the new guy or gal, but think about it from their perspective. They've just been thrust into a group of people who've known each other for a while and who spend a lot of time together. Then add to that the fact that this new person doesn't know the game you're playing. At the very least, he or she doesn't know the particular adventure, the particular town or city or planet, the particular NPCs, any of the events that've already occurred. But there's also the chance that this new member doesn't even know the game, the basic rules, which dice to use and when. Think about that when they walk in and look around, and when you and the others feel awkward because there's somebody new. The best way to stop feeling uncomfortable is to encourage everybody to get to know them, get used to them, get friendly with them -- and the best way to lead is by example.

Second, you can get them used to the game. This doesn't mean handing them a character sheet and saying, "Here's who you are," then shoving some dice at them and saying, "here, use these." Ask if they've ever played any RPGs before -- and don't sneer or run away if they say no. Everyone has to start some time. If they haven't, tell them a little about gaming in general, what it's like, why you do it, why it's fun. If they have played before, ask if they've ever played this particular system. Tell them a little about the system -- what genre it uses, what the general background is, what kind of dice it uses and a little about how. Don't give a full-out lecture about why it's important to increase your dexterity instead of your firearms -- they can pick that sort of thing up later. Just tell them enough so that they know what the basic concept is.

Then tell them a little about the specific game. Introduce everyone else, if they haven't introduced themselves. Tell them the name of everyone's characters, what kind of character they are, and what the group is like in general: "We're a search-and-rescue team for the Russians," or "We're a mercenary band, and we're currently fighting to protect the prince before his coronation as King." Ask the GM what you can and can't talk about, so that you don't give away anything the new member should be learning through the game itself.

Next, ask the new member if he or she has a character. Some of these people have gamed before, and even played this same system; they just haven't played with you. So they may have a character already, or be able to create a new one on their own. But others, especially those who've never gamed at all, will need a little help.

To be honest, the best thing to do at first is probably to keep any and all game books away from the new member, and not let him/her anywhere near a character sheet. Why? Make him/her sit in on one session without playing, just watching and listening. This gives them a chance to see what the game is like and to understand what's involved. Then, at the end of that session, help them create a character, so that they can play the following session. This way, they'll also have some concept of a character already -- "I really like the archer you're playing, could I do that? Only, I'd sort of like to be entirely a city-boy, instead of being another wilderness scout." Remember, always, that the rules are the

least important thing for a new member to learn. Anyone can pick up the rules, and you can always loan them the book so they can read it at home. The real key is for them to get a sense of the game, a feel for the story -- and an inkling of just how much fun it is to play. And the best way to do that is to have the established members welcome them in, show them around a bit, and then demonstrate just how entertaining all of this gaming stuff can be. Don't try to impress them, though; this person is going to see you snarfing down pizza and guzzling soda, after all. And this isn't a school play; you don't have to perform for someone else. Just relax and have fun playing, as usual. The best thing you can show a new member is that this really is fun, and that it's okay to relax and enjoy it and get into the story.

And, after a while, those new members will feel at home there, too. They'll learn the rules, they'll be familiar with the dice -- and, as time passes, they'll be able to share in some of the stories of past adventures. They'll become a full-fledged member of the group. And you'll eventually forget that there was a time when they weren't right there with you. . . playing the game.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

by C. A. Johnson

Art by Dan Smith

In the gleaming business district of Seattle, there is a small, but growing law and accounting firm, Finch-Barry. Over the past five years or so it has made a quiet name for itself guaranteeing secure transactions between people who have never met. Most of these are legitimate. Some, however, belong in the Shadows.

So far, Finch-Barry's success has been largely due to the fact that they have been able to keep their role in many of these exchanges secret. Using connections to larger institutions and financial firms, they have acted as second, and even third parties in many of their business dealings. This allows them to keep their overhead low, as they can keep relatively light security on their properties most of the time. On the occasions that increased security is necessary, they contract out for the necessary span of time. They do not discriminate in terms or what is being exchanged. Funds, items, documents, and real estate are all processed with the businesslike efficiency that distinguishes the successful from the bankrupt. They perform their duties, collect their fees, and tally the balance sheets.

Not all of their clients are of this type. Some arrange their affairs directly with the firm. These clients are given every courtesy, but play a relatively minor role in the firm's financing. They are not scrutinized as thoroughly as the higher income accounts, and operate under less stringent company policies, most of the time.

This time they should have been paying closer attention.

Box of Rain is a run designed for three to five beginning Shadowrunners. It is an excellent starting adventure for a campaign. It also works just fine as a one-shot.

The Facts

Gary Bergeron was a Wage Mage in a research facility for most of his life. His career was essentially unremarkable, from a shadowy perspective. He worked in routine, day to day uses of magic, refining spell formulae, cataloging spirits, and streamlining commercial rituals. He wasn't considered bright enough to work the cutting edge, and lacked the ambition to strike out on his own. He did his job, went home to his library and his wife, and retired early on a generous package offered by his company. Just before he retired, he contacted Finch-Barry with a request. He placed in their possession a small, ornate box, sealed with lead. His instructions were simple. Upon his death, the box was to be transferred to an old classmate of his from his alma mater. Should that classmate predecease him, the box went to his nearest magically active relative. Should a suitable relative not be found, the box would pass into the possession of the Dunkelzahn Institute for Magical Research. The box was to be neither opened or assensed by the firm. It was a simple request. The client was deemed a low risk. The firm accepted the commission sight unseen.

While his career remained largely undistinguished, Gary Bergeron did stumble upon something quite by accident during his employment. He managed to acquire the True Name of a free Storm Spirit during a company sponsored

research junket. He wisely kept this information to himself. He kept the name as a private ace in the hole. That ace remained buried for many years. As his career wound to a close, and he saw the final chapters of his life start to write themselves, Bergeron took steps with his treasure. Such a thing could not stay buried forever, yet he saw no satisfactory way to deal with it. His employers would take a dim view of his keeping such a secret from them, perhaps even dim enough to revoke his retirement package. He had no family outside of his wife, whose safety he did not wish to risk. So, with an old school buddy in mind, he went to Finch-Barry.

Two years later, Gary Bergeron died of a heart attack.

Enter the Shadows.

The Meet

The runners are contacted by one of their usual crew. The job is easy, the pay good, but not alarmingly so. They have to break into Finch-Barry and liberate the contents of the safe in the office of one Harold Gloswitz. These are to be delivered as is to an address on the outskirts of town. They are not to be examined in any way. The job must be done within twenty-four hours. The pay is twenty thousand nuyen.

According to their contacts, security is light. Alarms at the doors and windows alert Lone Star of intrusion, and occasionally guards patrol the perimeter and interior of the building. The guards are standard issue, low end Star grunts, as a rule, although upper end goons have been spotted from time to time. Astral security is similarly sporadic. The GM may dispense whatever of the above information on the firm fits the information flow of the campaign. One could even tie the firm into some of the team's major corporate adversaries, should a red herring be needed. If the characters ask around and roll well, the following snippets of data are available.

- No guards have been seen there in the past several nights.
- No armored or unusual vehicles were seen going in within the past thirty-six hours.
- The only deliveries made during that time were by bonded couriers and catering personnel.
- No high profile or noteworthy personages entered or left the building to anyone's knowledge.
- Harold Gloswitz has been employed at Finch-Barry since shortly after the firm opened, and has enjoyed a record of almost tedious mediocrity.

In short, there is no reason to believe that this run is anything other than it appears on the surface. . . a milk run. Try as they might, the characters are unable to locate any skullduggery, subterfuge, treachery, or hint of scandal in the mission other than the obvious criminal act they are being asked to perform.

The Run

The GM should play the run into Finch-Barry to the hilt, just to get the players good and paranoid. Roll dice every time they approach a corner and grin at the results. Throw vague hints of danger at them. ("You may have heard something, but you aren't sure. What now?") When it all adds up, though, the actual break-in is about as thrilling as a trip to the local Stuffer Shack. The team has no real trouble breaching security, obtaining the goods, and making a clean getaway. . . unless they do something silly, of course. Then the GM can do with them as they please. The safe contains several folders full of legal documents and the box. The GM is invited to add whatever complications seem appropriate to the campaign with these papers. The only thing of note that happens is the unexpected storm that starts to churn slowly over the city. It seems to begin shortly after the characters enter the building. Downplay this as much as possible. It's too important.

It Never Rains . . .

Things get more difficult before the payoff. The Spirit learned of
Bergeron's research very shortly after he made his discovery. It did a

bit of its own legwork, and figured the odds of Gary finding its secret were fairly good. When Bergeron made no attempt to use the information, it thought itself safe, and took steps to remove the incriminating data from where he had found it. Then it settled into a watchful quiescence, with its attentions focused loosely on Gary Bergeron.

If it had left well enough alone, it would have been safer. Instead, it bungled the job without realizing it. It erased the information, but not the traces of its actions. If the research firm were anything other then an Aztechnology front, it might have been overlooked. As it was, investigation led to hypotheses, which led to action. Gary Bergeron worked the rest of his life under low level, low priority surveillance, along with several other researchers within a set span of time before the cleansing. The surveillance paid off when Gary contacted Finch-Barry.

Yes, you read correctly. The runners are working for Aztechnology, though the connection is buried so many levels deep in corporate financial webs it will be a very difficult task to trace. (If your players really feel like making the effort, feel free to assign a ludicrously high target number to the test. The author would suggest at least a 12, with two successes needed.) They want the box. They don't know what's in it, but they believe (correctly) it came out of their libraries. They know it is valuable enough to warrant contacting Finch-Barry to handle it. If they find themselves to be wrong, the company will simply claim to have found the box after a botched raid on their assets, and turn it back over to the firm, thus proving their concern for the privacy and rights of others.

The company doesn't consider this to be a top priority situation. They chose to expend minimal resources on it. If the team fails, the company will simply allow the matter to drop, or attempt to purchase the information legitimately. The team will not be a target for Azzie teams if they drop the ball on this one.

However, once the team moves, the spirit believes it has little choice. The storm that has churned slowly over the city until now shatters over the team with frightening intensity. Assensing the storm will reveal the spirit's presence. Its aura will be masked to appear as any other Storm Spirit might. It will not act directly against the team if at all possible. It knows enough about the nature of shadowy dealings to believe the runners do not know what they have. However, this spirit is not without friends. First among these is a human Badger shaman and his small band of followers and hirelings. The spirit will lend its own powers to the melee as it deems necessary. Sheets of rain will hide Nate and his band. Unreasoning fear may seize one or more of the runners. If Nate is in serious jeopardy, deadly lightning may strike. The spirit will use this as a last resort. It prefers not to kill directly. It has no such fear of people dying as an indirect result of its powers.

Nate Longclaw, Shaman of Badger (+2 dice to Combat spells, +2 dice to summon Forest Spirits. Berserk as Bear Shaman.)

B Q S C I W R E M
4 4 3 5 6 5 5 6 6

Skills: Sorcery 6, Conjuring 5, Pistols 4, Edged weapons 4, Athletics 4, Stealth 3, Leadership 4

Knowledge Skills: If the GM wants to use Nate as a continuing villain/adversary they are free to add whatever Knowledge skills they deem appropriate.

Spells: Death Touch 5, Powerbolt 5, Stunball 6, Increase Body 5, Heal 4, Combat Sense 3

Gear: Lined coat, Sword, 2 Knives, Browning Max Power with 40 rounds of standard ammo. He has 800 nuyen on him to pay off his team.

Nate is an ethical defender doing a favor for a friend. He will press the fight as long as possible, but will not sacrifice his life unless cornered or berserk. He will not abandon his team or kill indiscriminately. His first priority is obtaining the box and making a clean getaway. He will set his tactics appropriately. He has a native guide in the form of a couple of sprawl gangers and a sufficient number of tribesmen at his disposal to challenge the characters.

Tribesman

B Q S C I W R E
6 5 4 4 4 4 4 6

Skills: Unarmed Combat 5, Edged Weapon 4, Rifle 5, Projectile Weapon 5, Stealth 5

Equip about half of them with Remington 750's, the rest with bows. All will have knives and light armor.

These people are loyal to Nate, and will protect him from harm. If he is captured, they will try to free him. If he is killed, they will try to take his body and run. The gang members are on their own.

As for the gang members, the GM is encouraged to use any gang that exists in his game. These guys were hired on short notice. They are basic gang members with minimal cyber and street level weapons. They are in it strictly for the money. Should the battle gets a little too hot for their liking, they'll take the deposit and run.

. . .But It Pours

If the runners take Nate and his boys, the spirit's options will thin out yet again. It will approach the team directly. How it approaches will depend on several factors, not the least of which is how the team dealt with Nate. If the characters made some attempt to reason with the shaman, or to talk their way clear, the spirit will be more favorably inclined towards them. It will not offer money. It doesn't have the Wealth power, and doesn't really understand how stones and metal could be valuable anyway. The idea of money and wealth is something best left to the "young ones," otherwise known as the Spirits of Man, so far as this venerable rider of the storms is concerned. It understands a favor for a favor just fine, though. While it will hesitate to reveal its true nature, it may claim to have friends of means who could "summon" a more powerful spirit ally for a single run. It could also act as a contact for the group, providing information on certain targets for a time. This could even become a long-range asset to the team, although the spirit will have its own agenda that it may use the runners to pursue.

If the characters used lethal force without any recourse to stealth or reason, the spirit will be much more cautious. It will scout ahead of the team to find the final meet and attack the people it finds there, bending the full force of its will to eliminating the Johnson and his entourage before the characters arrive. Then, it could simply buy the box with the team all unaware. It will not be aware of any special call signs or passwords that may have been arranged, and may not have had the time to clean up after itself. If the team gets too suspicious ("The Johnson's alone at the payoff? What, does he trust us or something?") the spirit will bend all efforts to obtaining or destroying the box and its contents. If no one notices anything, the runners will be paid, but Aztechnology will be less then pleased with what they will see as a double cross. Things may get considerably hotter than the team expects sometime in the not too distant future.

The Spirit

Force 5, Spirit Energy 4
B Q S C I W R
7 13 6 5 5 5 6

Powers: Aura Masking, Concealment, Confusion, Dispelling, Fear, Human Form, Materialization, Innate Spell (Lighting Bolt.)

A protector, this ancient force of nature sees no need to tie itself to a pattern of sounds, and so has not picked a "handle" for everyday use. Friends know it as the Hidden Storm, but that is a title of convenience only for their benefit. When it walks as a man, it appears as a towering 6'6" Amerindian with gray eyes and a whipcord physique, wearing whatever seems appropriate. It prefers skins and leathers if at all possible.

The Hidden Storm has not given much thought to metahuman society and culture. It is far too concerned with the land and sky to be bothered much by the trivialities of politics and finance. As a result, it lacks a bit in the social graces, tending toward brutally direct observations and utterly straightforward statements. This is not to say that the Hidden Storm won't lie. It just does so in a brutally direct, utterly straightforward fashion. It never uses four words when one will do. It does not ask for things. It expects them. Saying thank you is simply irrelevant. Once it has what it wants, whoever it is dealing with becomes similarly irrelevant. It takes its freedom *very* seriously, and will do its best to destroy anything that threatens that freedom, including the characters.

by Michael S. Miller

Art by Dan Smith, Colored by Alex Fernandez

A mixed cabal of tradition mages strikes another blow against the monolithic Technocracy:

Storyteller: *As you enter the core of the Technomancer's stronghold, you feel the stifling weight of consensual reality pressing down upon you. You can almost hear the Paradox spirits waiting for you to tamper with the threads of the Tapestry.*

Euthanatos: *Now is a time for subtlety, my friends; let's finish this quickly, quietly and without magick!*

A bit later . . .

ST: *I'm sorry, Dr. Ampere, the electronic lock on the door seems far too complex for you to unscramble. Just then, from the hallway, two seven-foot tall men with a mechanical red glow in their eyes and a chain gun in each hand march methodically into the room.*

Virtual Adept: *HIT Marks! And us without magick!! Run for cover!*

Akashic Brother: *Ahem. Using the art of Do, I cover the yards between us in a single leap, grab the one HIT Mark at his Point of Most Precarious Balance and execute a skillful Do throw to hurl him into his partner. I do* (roll, roll, count) *nine levels of damage against each of them.*

ST: (roll, count, groan) *Well, sparks rain out from the twisted bodies of your two assailants as the malicious red gleam fades from their eyes.*

Other players: *Um, I guess we applaud?*

Akashic Brother: *Stand aside, Dr. Ampere, a graceful Do flying kick should have that door open in moments.*

* * *

Scenarios like this ought not be too unfamiliar to any *Mage* Storyteller who has had an active Akashic Brother among the characters. To bring more balance to the game, a Storyteller has two basic options. The first is heavy-handed and bound to be unpopular: ban the skill of Do. The second is to ask the question: "Why should the Akashic Brotherhood have all the fun?" This article begins to answer that question.

Just as each of the nine Traditions have handed down their secrets of Magick through the centuries, they also would have developed non-magickal secret knowledges within their chantries. Learning these skills could also be used to test a chantry's acolytes to see if they are good candidates for Awakening.

Just as Do has served as the basis for powerful rotes, so too can the knowledges presented here be used in conjunction with magickal effects. Though a list of possible rotes goes beyond the scope of this article, a bit of imagination can surely generate a plethora of ideas.

What follows are Non-Magickal Secret Knowledges for the Euthanatos, Order of Hermes, Sons of Ether and Virtual Adepts. Just like Do, each of these abilities is considered a Skill for purposes of game mechanics.

The Traditional Secret Knowledges

Euthanatos -- Timing

The Euthanatos have dedicated themselves to seeing that souls are released from their current incarnations at the proper moment to ensure their favorable return to life. To this end they have cultivated the art of impeccable Timing. Just as the Great Cycle dictates a time for life and a time for death, all things have a proper time allotted to them. Through their continued study of the ebb and flow of the Wheel of Fortune, the masters of the Good Death can divine when that proper time has come and act upon it to greatest advantage.

What's Magick Got To Do With It?

Timing Slip			
2	**4**	**6**	**8**

Of course, this sense of Timing enables skilled Euthanatos to do more than tell a killer joke (pun intended). Outside of action scenes, this awareness can decrease the difficulty of any task relying on precise timing, such as slipping past a security guard or camera, successfully navigating rush hour traffic, or hailing a cab in the rain. By making a Perception + Timing roll, difficulty 8, the Euthanatos can lower the difficulty of the task by half the number of successes (Rounded up, maximum of -3). This bonus may be transferred to another character only if advice about the activity can be helpfully communicated in a timely fashion, at the Storyteller's discretion.

During action scenes, the rhythm of conflict is represented through initiative. Timing can be used in two ways. The Storyteller may allow one or both methods. The first and easiest method allows the character to substitute her Timing skill for her Alertness for purposes of determining initiative.

To use the second method, the player makes a Wits + Timing roll, difficulty 7. For every three successes, the player may choose to gain either a Timing Slip (see Figure 1) or a Seize Initiative chip. A player may never have more Seize Initiative chips than Timing Slips. A Timing Slip lists four initiative rolls. During each of the next four rounds, the player may decide which of these numbers is her initiative roll for that round. She then crosses that number off the list, leaving only three choices for the next round, and so on. The player may decide which number to use at any point in the round. After a player has begun to use a Timing Slip, she may not opt to roll initiative until all the numbers have been crossed off. She has attuned herself to the turning of the Wheel of Fate and cannot easily shrug that burden. A Seize Initiative chip can be spent at any point in any round in which the player has not already acted to allow the player to act at that very moment. The player does not cross off a number from her Timing Slip when using a Seize Initiative chip.

- • Novice: "Take my wife. . . please."
- •• Practiced: Video game champ

- ••• Competent: "Turn left . . . now!"
- •••• Expert: "We ought to leave at 7:13:42 PM EST."
- ••••• Master: "Not so fast, Mr. Ninja!"

Order of Hermes -- Alchemy

Centuries of research into this so-called art of the purifying the soul have been conducted in the various Hermetic houses. Turning lead to gold was always a fools' diversion. The true secrets of Alchemy are known to the ancient Order and few others. Game mechanics for this skill have been detailed in both *Halls of the Arcanum* and *World of Darkness: Sorcerer*.

Sons of Ether -- Improvisational Mechanics

A perennial dilemma of the Etherians is that their theories tend to be so far advanced -- or so long forgotten -- that the Scientific equipment needed to test their hypotheses is often unavailable. However, if the supply catalogs no longer carry SubEtheric Vibratory Oscillators, a good set of sub-woofers can easily be converted. The Etherians have long cultivated the art of Improvisational Mechanics to fulfill the needs of their experiments. While this leaves no toaster safe from the forces of technological "Progress" (as many Etherians call it), it also helps cultivate the flexibility of mind a Child of Ether needs to court Scientific Inspiration.

Students of Improvisational Mechanics are seldom at a loss for lab equipment of all sorts. If the appropriate materials for an experiment cannot be acquired (and when can they?), an Intelligence + Improvisational Mechanics roll, difficulty 7 will allow the Etherian to substitute other types of equipment -- with the Storyteller's permission -- for that which is required, if at least two successes are attained. Because of this, masters of Improvisational Mechanics tend to have laboratories full to the rafters with equipment, and a severe lack of functional refrigerators, televisions, garage door openers and, of course, duct tape.

During action scenes, a skilled Improvisational Mechanic can use her knowledge of the myriad uses of technology to give her an edge over her opponents. If she is using an item or items of technology in a manner. . . not recommended by the manufacturer, a talented Etherian may succeed far more spectacularly than if she had possessed the proper equipment! The player makes a Wits + Improvisational Mechanics roll, difficulty 8. For every three successes, the difficulty of the task is reduced by 1 (maximum of -3). Such Improvisational Mechanisms may take the form of car battery explosives or sewing machine lock picks, just so long as they are inspirational and unusual (the Storyteller may also require some level of plausibility). Though this ability can be used to Improvise a non-unique magickal focus, its bonuses can never more than double the bonus for using the focus regularly. This aplomb with which many Etherians employ whatever happens to be on hand has been dubbed by some snide Virtual Adepts as "the MacGuyver Syndrome."

- • Novice: "Where's my duct tape?"
- •• Practiced: "If I insert tab A into socket M . . ."
- ••• Competent: "All I need now is a transistor radio and some household bleach."
- •••• Expert: "Who needs plutonium? We'll wing it."
- ••••• Master: You don't even use a Swiss army knife.

Virtual Adepts -- Analysis

It is too common a error among Tradition mages to forget that the Adepts' trinary computers are only a convenient tool, not a goal in and of themselves. To ensure that Reality v2.0 is truly an improvement on the current release, the VAs have cultivated the art of Analysis to help them spot the bugs that afflict the world we are presented. In closed on-line seminars on "Lateral Thinking" and "Advanced Insight Theory" the Virtual Adepts distill the essentials of

Analytical discernment.

Of course, thinking about something Analytically often yields more fruit than less methodical, traditional thought patterns. Those skilled in the science of Analysis can temporarily increase their mental attributes through its use. The player makes a Perception + Analysis roll to increase her Wits, an Intelligence + Analysis roll for greater Perception, or a Wits + Analysis roll to gain greater Intelligence. The difficulty for each of these rolls is 8. For every three successes, the player may choose to raise the Attribute by 1 point or extend the effects by one round (in combat) or one usage (out of combat). The boosted Attribute lasts for one round, if in an action scene, or one usage in a roleplaying scene, unless extended through successes. The effects cannot be extended by more than three uses outside of action scenes. Attributes cannot be raised above 5 in this manner, nor can they be increased more than 2 points from their original value. If the player makes an Attribute + Analysis roll using an Attribute that has been increased through the use of Analysis, the original value of the Attribute, not its Analysis-enhanced value, is used.

Analytical Virtual Adepts can also concoct frighteningly effective plans. Any time a Virtual Adept skilled in Analysis comes up with a plan of action, she can make an Intelligence + Analysis roll, difficulty 8. For every three successes, the Virtual Adept can reduce the difficulty of one non-magickal roll called for in the plan by 1 (maximum of -3). The portion of the plan affected is chosen at the time of the Analytical thinking, although any character who heard the plan may then perform that portion of the plan and gain the benefit. The entire plan does not have to succeed, or even be attempted, for one part of it to gain the benefits of Analysis. If things change and the chosen part of the plan never comes to pass, the benefit is lost. No plan may be Analyzed more than once.

- • Novice: "Wow. I never thought of that before."
- •• Practiced: "Riddle me this!"
- ••• Competent: "That's why you have to wear the uniform."
- •••• Expert: "If she hadn't made the password the name of her first-grade imaginary friend, this might have been challenging."
- ••••• Master: "Elementary, I knew where the hideout was by the shade of the mustard stain on his lapel."

A bit later . . . (Take Two)

ST: I'm sorry, Dr. Ampere, the electronic lock on the door seems far too complex for you to unscramble. Just then, from the hallway, two seven-foot tall men with a mechanical red glow in their eyes and a chain gun in each hand march methodically into the room.

Euthanatos: HIT Marks! Just in time.

Virtual Adept: Knowing that the Technocracy values compliance over individual initiative, it stands to reason that they would have programmed their servants to strike down those with proud, defiant features as a first priority. As the perfect distraction, I stand up and shout, "You will never crush the Human Spirit!"

Son of Ether: I draw my soldering iron and ready it for battle.

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

?

by Daniel R. Howard

Art by Ed Northcott

"I would rather have the blue band of the Medal of Honor around my neck than be President." -- Harry S. Truman

It can be difficult for a GM to keep a campaign interesting for players whose characters are lowly grunts, slogging along in the rank and file of a military unit. Constant mass combat where the players do nothing but roll a few dice occasionally and wait for the GM to determine the results and recalculate *Troop Strengths* can make for a very boring session. Of course a talented GM can add flair and excitement to the driest of sessions, but many GMs need all the help they can get to prevent the players from losing interest. Below are suggestions that the GM can adopt to add roleplaying elements to an essentially mass-combat oriented campaign.

Medals and decorations were designed to encourage and reward bravery. They have been used throughout history in many cultures from ancient Rome through to present day. In Europe, medals were awarded for military valor in the 15th century, but not until the end of the 18th century did medals commemorating victorious engagements become widespread. Napoleon created the Legion of Honor for those displaying exceptional courage and valor, Britain created the Victoria Cross in the aftermath of the Crimean War, and the United States' Medal of Honor arose from a need to reward bravery during the Civil War. In some cases, such as the recipient of the Victoria Cross, a lifetime pension accompanies the award (in 1995 the Cross was increased to 1,300 pounds per year).

In practical terms, military decorations are a cheap, effective method of maintaining morale and encouraging gallantry among the troops. The intrinsic value of an award is not the only method of judging its significance. The Victoria Cross may only be made of bronze but it is the highest award a member of the Commonwealth can receive. The metal for this decoration is taken exclusively from two Chinese bronze cannons captured from the Russians during the Crimean War.

Mass Combat and Glory Rolls (p.CII118)

Instead of constantly rolling for promotion every time a PC makes an exceptional glory roll, a list of awards, honors and citations can be created in order to spice up a campaign and to give the GM a little variety when rewarding characters for courageous fighting. Some characters (glory hounds, for example) would be more likely to volunteer to be the standard bearer or to lead a dangerous assignment if they might get a medal out of it.

A citation for meritorious combat could be awarded every time the character earns a *temporary* reputation bonus (see p.CII118 for Glory Roll results). Medals and decorations can be equated with *permanent* reputation bonuses. If a character accumulates +3 points of permanent reputation during a battle then he can receive one or more awards totaling +3 reputation points. For example (see Roman awards -- listed below) a legionary who earned a +3 permanent reputation bonus after several days of fighting with exceptional courage, could be awarded a gold armilla (+2 reputation) and a corona vallaris (+1 reputation bonus). Note that it is extremely difficult to gain a permanent

reputation bonus through the ***GURPS Mass Combat System*** -- a Glory Roll succeeding by 10 or more is required. Heavily decorated characters would be extremely rare and veterans of countless engagements.

These kinds of awards and decorations should be reserved mainly for enlisted men. Throughout most of history officers were rewarded with promotions and titles.

Reaction bonuses are only appropriate when the person is familiar with the significance of the award. Reaction bonuses for multiple awards are cumulative up to a maximum of +8. This bonus can also apply even if the character is not displaying the award -- as long as the other person is aware that it was awarded. This reaction bonus may not apply if the character displays his awards constantly or at inappropriate times (it might even earn a reaction *penalty*) -- a hero should be unpretentious and modest. Appropriate occasions where awards could be worn include: dress parades; when meeting a VIP; any "black tie" occasion; other formal gatherings -- both military and civilian.

Ancient Rome awarded *armillae* (gold and silver arm bands) and *phallerae* (decorated metallic discs) to her troops. These could be worth a +1 or +2 reaction bonus -- depending on whether the award was of silver or gold. The Republic also reserved a collection of *coronae* (crowns) -- for actions of the very highest valor. They are listed here in ascending order of significance:

- *corona vallaris* -- a gold crown awarded to the first man to cross the ramparts of an enemy camp. +1 reaction bonus.
- *corona navalis* -- a gold crown emblazoned with ships' beaks; for outstanding valor during a naval engagement. +1 reaction bonus.
- *corona muralis* -- a crenelated gold crown awarded to the first man over the walls of an enemy city. +2 reaction bonus.
- *corona aurea* -- awarded to a soldier who killed an enemy in single combat and held the ground for the rest of the engagement. +2 reaction bonus.
- *corona civica* -- the civic crown; made of ordinary oak leaves; awarded to a man who had saved the lives of fellow soldiers, and held the ground for the rest of the engagement. +3 reaction bonus. (The oak leaves that Julius Caesar was famous for wearing was this award. He received it early in his career in Asia during the storming of the city of Mytilene.)
- *corona graminea* -- the grass crown; the highest decoration a soldier can receive; it was awarded to a man who saved a whole legion, or even an entire army. +5 reaction bonus.

It is interesting to note that the lesser awards are intrinsically far more valuable than the highest two. This could be an indication that they were newer innovations.

Mass Combat -- Awards and Decorations

In addition Rome rewarded her victorious generals with a triumph -- an imposing parade where the general rides through the city displaying captured loot and trophies and prisoners.

The GM may chose to give the character an award instead of rolling for promotion. This would be especially appropriate if the PC was already promoted earlier in the battle.

Temporary reputation may be traded for permanent reputation at a cost of 5 for 1 -- when the PC accumulates a +5 reputation bonus for a specific period of time he can trade this in for +1 permanent reputation and receive an appropriate decoration.

In the above example, the GM should not allow the top two awards to be received during mass combat. Only a specific and difficult roleplaying event (perhaps partially including mass combat) would result in the granting of these precious awards. In Britain it has been estimated that the odds of surviving an action resulting in being nominated for the

Victoria Cross is 1 in 10. Paradoxically, in the spirit of these nominations, a character should not consider the winning of such a decoration to be motivation for considering whether to act. Spontaneous acts of selfless courage with little regard for the consequences seem to dominate nominations for the highest decorations. The award is a consequence of the action not vice versa.

Examples of Roleplaying Suggestions for Mass Combat Oriented Campaigns

Below are historical examples of actions that were or should have been nominated for exceptional bravery awards. They are meant to set the tone for a mass combat campaign and to inspire the players to emulate these heroic deeds with their own characters. The GM should keep these in mind and provide ample opportunities for creative roleplaying in this sort of campaign.

Selfless Courage

On April 13, 1945, a predawn Japanese counterattack struck the flank of Technical Sergeant Beaufort Anderson's unit. He ordered his men to take cover in an old tomb, and then, armed only with a carbine, faced the onslaught alone. After emptying one magazine at pointblank range into the screaming attackers, he seized an enemy mortar dud and threw it back among the charging enemy, killing several as it burst. Securing a box of mortar shells, he extracted the safety pins, banged the bases upon a rock to arm them and proceeded alternately to hurl shells and fire his piece among the advancing foe, finally forcing them to withdraw.

Despite the protests of his comrades, and bleeding profusely from a severe shrapnel wound, he made his way to his company commander to report the action. T/Sgt. Anderson's intrepid conduct in the face of overwhelming odds accounted for 25 enemy killed and several machine guns and knee mortars destroyed, thus single-handedly removing a serious threat to the company's flank.

For Valor

At Ruweisat, North Africa, at dawn on July 15th, 1942, the battalion to which New Zealand Sergeant Keith Elliott belonged was attacked on three flanks by tanks. Elliott disobeyed orders and exercised his own initiative, saving his platoon from certain capture or death. Under heavy tank, machine-gun and shell fire, Sergeant Elliott led his men to the cover of a ridge 300 yards away, during which he sustained a chest wound.

Here he re-formed his troops and led them to a dominating ridge a further 500 yards away where they came under enemy machine-gun and mortar fire. He located enemy machine-gun posts on his front and right flank and while one section attacked on the right flank, Sergeant Elliott led seven men in a bayonet charge across 500 yards of open ground in the face of heavy fire and captured four enemy machine-gun posts and an anti-tank gun, killing a number of the enemy and taking fifty prisoners.

His section then came under fire from a machine-gun post on his left flank. He immediately charged this post single-handed and succeeded in capturing it, killing several of the enemy and taking fifteen prisoners. During these two assaults he sustained three more wounds in the back and legs.

Owing to Sergeant Elliott's quick grasp of the situation, great personal courage and leadership, nineteen men who were the only survivors of 'B' Company of his battalion captured and destroyed five machine-guns, one anti-tank gun, killed a great number of the enemy and captured 130 prisoners. Sergeant Elliott sustained only one casualty among his men and brought him safely back to the nearest advanced dressing-station.

Ultimate Sacrifice

At Saipan, Mariana Islands, June 19th, 1944, Sergeant Thomas Baker's company was held up by fire from automatic

weapons and small-arms fire from strongly fortified enemy positions that commanded the view of the company. Sgt. (then Pvt.) Baker voluntarily took a bazooka and dashed alone to within 100 yards of the enemy. Through heavy rifle and machine gun fire that was directed at him by the enemy, he knocked out the strong point, enabling his company to assault the ridge.

Some days later while his company advanced across the open field flanked with obstructions and places of concealment for the enemy, Sgt. Baker again voluntarily took up a position in the rear to protect the company against surprise attack and came upon two heavily fortified enemy pockets manned by two officers and ten enlisted men, which had been bypassed. Without regard for such superior numbers, he unhesitatingly attacked and killed all of them. Five hundred yards farther, he discovered six men of the enemy who had concealed themselves behind friendly lines and destroyed all of them.

On July 7, 1944, the perimeter of which Sgt. Baker was a part, was attacked from three sides by from 3,000 to 5,000 Japanese. During the early stages of this attack, Sgt. Baker was seriously wounded but he insisted on remaining in the line and fired at the enemy at ranges sometimes as close as 5 yards until his ammunition ran out. Without ammunition and with his own weapon battered to uselessness from hand-to-hand combat, he was carried about 50 yards to the rear by a comrade, who was then himself wounded. At this point Sgt. Baker refused to be moved any farther stating that he preferred to be left to die rather than risk the lives of any more of his friends.

A short time later, at his request, he was placed in a sitting position against a small tree. Another comrade, withdrawing, offered assistance. Sgt. Baker refused, insisting that he be left alone and be given a soldier's pistol with its remaining 8 rounds of ammunition. When last seen alive, Sgt. Baker was propped against a tree, pistol in hand, calmly facing the foe. Later Sgt. Baker's body was found in the same position, gun empty, with 8 Japanese lying dead before him. His deeds were in keeping with the highest traditions of the U.S. Army.

For Courage and Compassion

On the afternoon of June 9th, 1866, a railway train from Quebec stopped at Danville. Locked in converted boxcars were 800 German immigrants. In another boxcar was 2000 pounds of ammunition for use against the Fenian raiders, and it was Private Timothy O'Hea's job along with four other men of the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade to guard.

Late in the afternoon, O'Hea noticed that the boxcar containing the ammunition was on fire and after shouting an alarm, discovered the railwaymen and other soldiers had fled. O'Hea grabbed the keys to the boxcar from a dithering Sergeant and climbed aboard. He ripped burning covers off ammunition cases and tossed them outside, then, making nineteen trips to a creek for buckets of water, he fought the flames for almost an hour. The immigrants cheered him on, unaware of their peril.

Timothy O'Hea fought on alone and was victorious. By evening, the ammunition had been loaded into another car and the train -- immigrant coaches still attached -- was on its way again. O'Hea not only displayed great courage and total disregard for his own life in putting out the fire in the boxcar, but also saved 200 immigrants from certain death had the ammunition exploded. He received the only Victoria Cross ever won in Canada.

Hazardous Duty

In central Asia Alexander the Great was confronted with an unassailable fortress atop the Sogdian Rock -- protected on all sides by vertical cliffs. The leader, Oxyartes, mocked Alexander saying that he would need "men with wings" to be able to take the fortress. That night Alexander sent up 300 of his most experienced mountaineers to climb the cliff-face in the darkness -- an exceedingly difficult climb even during the day. 90% of the men completed the treacherous ascent. The next morning Alexander told Oxyartes that he had found his "men with wings" and told him to look on the rocks above him. Oxyartes surrendered without a fight.

Innovation and Courageous Defiance

During the Jewish revolt of 66-73 AD future emperor Vespasian was sent by Nero to put down the uprising. In early May 67AD a Jewish governor named Joseph ben Matthias slipped into the besieged city of Jotapata -- the strongest fortress in all Galilee -- only days before the Romans cut off all access. Roman atrocities had already terrified Joseph's men and most of his army had deserted him.

As soon as Vespasian heard that Joseph was in the city he attacked. Joseph responded with a vigorous counterattack which surprised the Romans, forcing them to withdraw. Subsequent attacks were repulsed for another five days. Vespasian realized that he was making no headway and settled down for a protracted siege.

Vespasian's engineers began construction of a platform against the approachable section of the city wall, protected by wooden hurdles and screens. Joseph's garrison hindered the Romans by hurling down giant rocks and pelting them with many missiles. Vespasian responded by bringing forward his archers and artillery -- the deadly rain of missiles prevented any Jew from manning the city wall. It seemed that they could do nothing as the platform inched higher and higher.

Joseph then organized guerilla parties and sent them screaming down on the Romans to tear down the screens -- exposing the workers to Jewish missiles. During the chaos the guerillas broke up the platform and hurdles and set everything on fire. Vespasian responded by linking a new set of hurdles together to remove the guerillas' avenue of attack. Work on the platform could begin again unhindered by further raids.

Realizing that he could not prevent the platform's construction Joseph built an ingenious protection screen -- behind which his workers could build up Jotapata's walls in safety. The wall consisted of railings fixed to the wall upon which were stretched raw ox hides. This screen proved remarkably resistant to Roman missiles. The huge stones from catapults failed to split the springy hides and arrows glanced off harmlessly. Firebrands failed to ignite because of the moisture in the raw skins. Thus shielded, the Jews raised the wall another 30 feet, built towers on it at short intervals and added a strong parapet -- all while under attack.

When the Romans saw this they became demoralized, thinking they would never take the city. Joseph noticed this and launched a daring night sortie. The Romans, caught unprepared, were sent reeling. The victorious Jews plundered the camp and set fire to all Roman works. Vespaian, disheartened and disgusted as his platform once again went up in flames, recalled his men and decided to blockade the town until it was starved into capitulation.

Water was scarce and the city would soon have to surrender. Joseph orchestrated an incredible deception. He ordered several men to soak their garments as if washing them and hang them on the outer wall to dry, so that the whole wall ran with water. Vespasian believed this apparently abundant supply of water, and concluded that Jotapata could hold out indefinitely. He immediately ordered a resumption of the assault.

The Romans constructed a ramp over the city's protective ditch and rolled a siege ram onto it. The ram was overlaid with hurdles of hide to protect the troops. Roman archers prevented the Jewish defenders from manning the parapet to attack the siege ram. Joseph's response was to have sacks filled with chaff and lowered them by ropes to the spot where the ram head would crash, thus cushioning the ram's blows. The Romans countered with sharp hooks on long poles to cut the ropes.

In desperation Joseph organized another sortie. He armed his men with timber coated with bitumen, pitch and brimstone. With these new flammable weapons they charged out. There was terrible fighting but the desperate Jews hurled themselves at the Romans. When Vespasian was wounded by an arrow in the foot the Romans retreated again in disorder. Ignoring the pain, Vespasian was soon hobbling about, taking command, and narrowly prevented a rout. As night fell the Jews retired to the city. Once again the Roman camp and siege works were in flames.

Joseph was dismayed when, only hours later, another Roman ram was crashing into the great wall of Jotapata. In the pre-dawn hours of the 29th day of the siege, the wall was finally breached. Vespasian retreated and waited for daylight. Joseph put the old and the wounded on the undamaged segments of the wall. The rest he placed at the gaps, leading the defense personally. He knew that the Romans would initiate the assault with a barrage of arrows so he ordered his men to bend beneath their shields and plug their ears against the terrifying Roman battle cry.

The missile attack came but the Jews were protected by their shields. The Romans surged forward with their dreadful battle cries. The Jews, unhearing and undaunted, met them with calm determination.

The Romans were nearly upon the wall when Joseph revealed his final scheme. He had his men pour cauldrons of boiling oil upon the advancing Romans. The elite troops broke ranks and retreated. (Note: this was the first recorded use of boiling oil as a weapon.) When the Romans regrouped and charged again Joseph poured boiled hay onto the gangways making them too slippery to stand upon. Those who fell off were quickly dispatched.

Once again Vespasian recalled his decimated troops. During this time the news of Jotapata's resistance spread like wildfire sparking uprisings in other cities. Vespasian dispatched legions to deal with them.

It took another 11 days for Vespasian to capture the city. He rebuilt his platform again. This time he also erected three towers more than fifty feet high and overlaid them with iron -- rendering them fireproof. On the 40th day of the siege Jotapata finally fell after many days of bloody hand to hand fighting. 40,000 Jews died that day and 1,200 sold into slavery. Many of Joseph's friends and picked soldiers committed suicide.

So ended a titanic battle of wits between two great military commanders. Joseph ben Matthias was eventually taken captive but was freed by Vespasian after he became emperor. He ended his days living in Rome as a private citizen.

Pyramid Pick

[Children of Fire](#)

Published by [Methods in the Madness](#)

Written by Erich Wambach

60 pages, free

When you think about the typical roleplaying game made available over the Internet for free the thing that springs to mind is that it is, above all else, *free*. Because there is no serious investment necessary to present the material to us we see a cascade of secondary effects as the standard norm: Poor presentation. Poor artwork. Questionable system design. Lots of rehashed ideas. Little research. Less development. No support.

If we wanted to generalize a little more we'd note that most freebies are one-man shows, and, thus, even if something stands out for some reason, it will usually never stand out in more ways than one or two. You might get a good artist, but what are the odds of them being a good writer? And if they happen to be both, how likely is it they're going to be good at system design, too?

So the odds are against you when you start surfing around looking through these freebies. But there *are* a lot of diamonds out there -- and not all of them are in the rough. What you need is a little guidance to point you in the right direction. . .

Which brings us to *Children of Fire* (available online from http://www.mimgames.com/cof).

The first thing you'll notice when you go to the webpage are the lavish illustrations which accompany the text. While lacking substantial content, the richness of visual design which supports the skillfully utilitarian lay-out of text and information not only supplements the writing (while not overpowering it or distracting from it), but also lets us begin checking things off of our mental checklist: Good presentation. Strong artwork.

Is there anything lying beneath this visual feast, though? Or are we looking at a shiny apple with a rotten core?

The central concept of *Children of Fire* is that the PCs are angels (the Children of Fire) sent to Earth to protect humanity (the children of clay) -- both from itself, and from other supernatural forces (including the obvious fallen angels, but also the Grigori, the Anakim, the Nephilim, and human Sorcerors). This is territory which has been well-covered before, so the key question really becomes whether or not *Children of Fire* succeeds at bringing anything new to the arena: It does.

The problem a game of angels has is that, when you get right down to it, angels -- as they are understood today in popular culture -- are simply not interesting characters to play. An interesting character is a flawed character -- a character who has to struggle against themselves as much as an exterior foe. Angels, on the other hand, are perceived as perfect beings who wander the universe doing nothing but good. Thus a typical game of this nature will have players taking on the roles of lost or even fallen angels, or it will "modernize" the angels by sullying them in one way or another.

Ironically, *Children of Fire* avoids the problems which typically lead to "modernization" by simply turning back the hands on the clock. Instead of adopting the cliches of today, *CoF* opts to base its setting on the rich mythology which was understood in ages past, but which has been lost in the gloss of the 20th century. Backed up with an array of solid research, Erich Wambach (the author) succeeds at bringing a very different look to some familiar territory. The nine choirs are flawed creations, but even in their imperfection they are viewed with awe and fear by the bulk of humanity.

So, we have some fresh ideas which are backed up with strong research. We can knock a couple more slots off of our checklist. What about system design?

Children of Fire uses a simple, relatively loose, set of rules based around a fairly standard 2d10 mechanic (roll the dice, add a score from the character sheet, compare to a difficulty number set by the nature of the task and the GM). This is a good fit for the material, amply covering the broad nature of angelic abilities.

Character creation is a ten step program, but focuses primarily on the assignation of points to various Aspects (Knowlege, Understanding, Power, Vigor, and Glory -- which are roughly equivalent to Attributes in most games) and Virtues (Justice, Prudence, Temperance, and Fortitude -- which are a mapping of the angel's moral make-up). This entire system, while bearing semblance to a typical set of character creation rules, actually emphasizes the utterly alien nature of angels. The fact that angels are quantified in ways which are completely different from the ways in which humans are quantified is a subtle, but powerful, game design tool.

Those are the strengths. Now, what are the weaknesses? The primary failing of *Children of Fire* is a lack of depth. There are only sixty pages of material in the basic book and certain elements of the background material read more as introductory pamphlets, rather than a solid tour guide. On the other hand, *Children of Fire* is receiving continuing support (a supplement, *Children of Clay*, is already available) -- and I expect to see the setting appropriately fleshed out. This wouldn't be acceptable if I had paid $20 or $30 for *Children of Fire*, but I didn't -- and the free nature of *CoF* allows its creators to take an approach that wouldn't work under different circumstances.

There are also some flaws in the general presentation of the material. Although the website itself is graphically rich, the PDF file available for download is not (I would have preferred the option of downloading a larger PDF which contained the graphics). Proofreading is sadly lacking, and the text is replete with typos, homonyms, and other errors (for example, the book can't quite figure out whether it wants 250,000,000 angels or 250,000 angels). The prose occasionally becomes stilted and awkward, a problem compounded by the occasionally condescending and annoyingly self-righteous implications of "this is the way you're *supposed* to game."

Those problems aside, *Children of Fire* is definitely worth taking the time to check out: A simple, effective system coupled to a setting with a lot of potential.

-- Justin Bacon

Pyramid Pick

Glorantha: Introduction To The Hero Wars

Published by [Issaries, Inc.](#)

Written by Greg Stafford and Peter Metcalfe

256 pages trade paperback size, $19.95

Fans of the long established fantasy world Glorantha have been waiting with bated breath (if you can wait with bated breath for years) for the release of a new role-playing system for it, to replace the venerable but still very usable *Runequest* system which vanished from print in a flurry of legal complications when Chaosium who created *RQ* parted company with Avalon Hill who had the publishing rights to it some years back. To be out of print for years and still to maintain a solid base of fanatical admirers is something that only Glorantha and Tekumel have been able to do in the world of role-playing. So the return of the world with a new game-system and a new publisher is something we've all been hoping will revive the fortunes of Glorantha-philes everywhere.

My reaction to the new *Hero Wars* game (which I'll let someone else review) has been slightly (well, more than slightly) ambiguous. Perhaps I'm just a middle aged reactionary yearning back to the joyful gaming memories of my youth, who can say? I'm a lot happier with Issaries second product. The last time a comprehensive guide to this world was attempted was 1988 when Avalon Hill brought out *Glorantha: Genertela* and that only tried to cover the northern continent. This attempts in a mere 256 pages to give a quick once over to the entire world. Of necessity it's brief but it is enough to spark the appetite of anyone interested in world design and has enough little bombs of previously undisclosed information to keep the Gloranthan enthusiasts happy too. (Harshax is one of the *Pharaoh's* titles? Does that mean he really is a time traveller? *What* Kralorelan mystics in Dragon Pass?) Each of the major countries and cultures gets a chapter and there is even a brief tour of the Outer World where Gods and Heroes are the common citizens and an outline of "upcoming events."

The book is pure background. You don't need to have read *Hero Wars* to enjoy it and it will doubtless be mined by people who still use *Runequest* to explore Glorantha and even by those interested in designing their own world who will never use the world in their own games. From the Sky Dome up above to the street-sellers on the Bridge of Light and No Light, from the blackest pits of Hell to the Ducks dodging zombies in the Upland Marsh you can use this book as an example of the best of creating myth, history, culture and geography, with a macrocosm and microcosm that fit one another.

However, neither production values nor organisation are as good as for Glorantha: Genertela. The artwork is, in my opinion, slightly better than that of *Hero Wars* and the lower standard of print and proof-reading may be forgiven since Issaries does not have the financial resources that Avalon Hill did. The lack of organisation is less easy to make allowances for. Again, as with *Hero Wars*, there is no index: something I find a little incredible in the age of electronic publishing. And chapters follow each other in an order that I found confusing. Why is there a chapter on Western monotheist culture after the first of the chapters about the countries of the West? Why are the chapters about the Elder Races scattered about the book?

Newcomers may find it less than totally helpful as an introduction in no small part because the "in-character" parts of the material, written as though by members of the various cultures are not clearly separated from the more "objective"

(or to use the Gloranthan term "God-Learner") descriptions. And in places the little Gloranthan in-jokes (like the fact that the name Gbaji or "Deceiver" is applied to both the god Nysalor and to his assassin Arkat) may confuse the uninitiated. Hopefully more people will be intrigued than are confused.

Issaries have chosen to release *Hero Wars* and its related products in Trade Paperback form in the conviction that this will allow them to break into the mainstream bookstores. I personally don't mind such a format so much for this book which is pure source material but I somewhat doubt its utility for game books which suffer a lot more hard treatment and need to consulted far more frequently. I can see my *Hero Wars* books breaking their backs quite early.

But if you want to play in Glorantha, buy this book. It's not expensive and it will allow you to fit the upcoming culture books into the world, and the parts into the whole. If it doesn't quite qualify as an Introduction, it is still worth the price of admission. (Hint to Issaries: Include the Frequently Asked Questions you're going to get in the second printing. Along with an index, pretty please.)

-- Michael Cule

Pyramid Review

The Vortex of Madness and Other Planar Perils (for AD&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Chris Pramas

96 pages, $17.95

The Vortex of Madness and Other Planar Perils is a set of five separate but linked adventures set in the outer planes. The adventures are designed to be separated from one another or run together -- more on that below. The cover proclaims that these adventures are "For High Level Heroes!" -- but there are no recommended levels to be found within. My estimation is that you would want to be at least 9th and probably at most 14th level to adventure in these areas -- lower level adventurers will not have the spells and abilities to handle the challenges within. Adventurers of much higher levels would need to have the challenges boosted in power to give them a run for their money.

Adventures are structured as more than just "dungeon crawls" -- encounters are not just monsters to fight, although they are completely statted out if the inevitable ensues. The adventures themselves present five unique areas for PCs to explore:

- "The Vortex of Madness" -- A magical prison in Limbo, holding a prisoner whose name is known to AD&Ders clear back to owners of *Eldritch Wizardry*. This mind-warping location provides a tie-in adventure to connect all of the other locations together.
- "The Citadel of Gith Reborn" -- A fortress on the Astral Plane containing rebellious Githyanki fighting to overthrow the lich-queen that rules their race. It presents opportunities for PCs to interact with Githyanki in a most unusual way -- peacefully.
- "Leonis" -- A tiny demiplane inhabited by a wizardly DaVinci and his creations. Here, function follows form, and unlikely machines work due to the magic and willpower of the wizard. Mechanical war machines and great wooden birds with clockwork engines roam the plane on behalf of their creator.
- "The Black Acropolis" -- A scheme by two titans seeking to free themselves from Tarturus, where they (and their ruler Cronus) where imprisoned ages ago by Zeus. PCs can aid or stop the attempt, which has more behind it than even the Titans suspect.
- "The City of Glass" -- an underwater metropolis on the Elemental Plane of Water. The city is divided into quarters ruled by individual races -- marids and jann, sea elves, humans, dwarves, and more. The city is a neutral zone for aquatic races, a place where enemies can gather to negotiate or trade. The City of Glass can easily become, or start as, a base for aquatic adventurers exploring the Elemental Plane of Water.

Each section contains:

- A random encounter table. Not just a "2-8 orcs" type of table, these contain terrain hazards, odd occurrences, and run-ins with the special creatures or situations that make the planes what they are.
- Descriptions of the effects of the specific plane on magic, with enough detail to need no additional books.
- The effects of travel to the plane on PCs.
- Major Inhabitant sections detailing the major NPCs of the area
- Monster descriptions are separate from the text -- they are boxed in one place per adventure making it easy for a GM to find stats he will need.
- Maps -- the maps are fairly small, but contain more than enough detail for the adventure at hand.
- Suggested ways to use the adventure -- everything from off-the- cuff Teleport failures to a planned encounter.

The tie-ins to the Vortex of Madness adventure are not seamless -- they almost seem tacked on afterwards (although it does have an interesting spin on the "sent on a quest for an artifact" gag.) This has its plusses and minuses. On the plus side, they give the GM a structure to work with but are easy to remove if you want to use an adventure separately. On the minus side, it takes some extra work on each of the adventures to make them fit with the meta-adventure.

This leads to the biggest (though still small) flaw in the supplement -- the adventures really need a reason for PC involvement. They cannot just be plugged in to a campaign. A GM will have to carefully fit the adventures to a group of PCs, tailor the reasons and challenges to them, and plan in advance. This is a flaw in a book of pre-written adventures, although GMs would probably want to take all of the steps I listed with any adventure.

The various adventures contain pointers to other *AD&D* supplements that could be useful -- the ***Manual of the Planes***, ***Planescape***, the ***Tome of Magic*** -- but do not require them. The references show you where you can go for more information but gives you move than enough to work with without it. This is of great aid to a GM lacking the supplements -- some out of print -- while it does not print so much that the supplements themselves would not add to the adventure.

Even at $17.95 and 96 pages, it felt like a good deal. The text is dense, although each page is headed with a 1 1/4" illustration -- reducing the actual text-per-page down. I bought the supplement to use with ***GURPS*** -- at least a basic familiarity with ***AD&D*** (either 1st or 2nd edition) is needed to use ***Vortex*** with another system.

-- Peter V. Dell'Orto

Episode One: The Phantom Profits

Where were you last year on May 19th? If you were like me, (and thousands of others) you were in line to see *Star Wars Episode I: The Phantom Menace*. It was, without a doubt, one of the most highly anticipated films of all time. Speculation ran high that it would be the most successful movie of all time. In Hollywood, success comes not only at the box office, but also in licensing income. Many merchandising pundits predicted that *The Phantom Menace* would exceed all previous measures for secondary income. Lots of them staked their reputations and millions of their companies' dollars on that prediction. However, when the film finally premiered, many fans were disappointed. Jar-Jar Binks was the proximate cause for many unhappy Star Wars fans, but the floppy-eared one was hardly the only thing that led to the film's failure. But did George Lucas deliver a failure, or were the biggest mistakes made by those who ordered too many Jar-Jar soap dispensers? Now that a year has passed, we can look at this question from a business perspective in this month's offering: Episode One: The Phantom Profits. Gamers are often also science fiction fans, so let's take a look at the markets which gamers are most familiar with: the film itself, the food & beverage industry, publishing, and toys & games.

By the time the film saw its first showings, Lucasfilm had spent $115 million dollars. That included all aspects of the film's production such as actors' salaries, Lucas' writing and directing fees, and set construction (which although built only as high as the actors' heads, was nevertheless $150,000 over budget due to Liam Neeson's 6' 4" frame). Even taking into account the fact that the cinema keeps a significant portion of a ticket's price, and that promotional expenses generally recoup themselves in advance of the production receiving any money, the $431 million that the film grossed in its US release (most of any film in 1999, and third on the all-time list, behind only *Titanic* and the *Star Wars: A New Hope*) *The Phantom Menace* made a nice profit for Lucas (who funded the entire production out of his own deep pockets). In addition, the film went on to rake in over $350 million overseas, all before the video release, which in its first 90 days of release has generated another $41 million in rental income. This doesn't even include sales in the home video market, or the income from the DVD release which will be either sometime next year, after all the three films have been completed, or never. . . depending on which commentator you choose to believe. The soundtrack album by John Williams had a first pressing of over 1 million copies, the largest first pressing ever for a soundtrack. By purely business standards, the film alone was a great success.

Still, with the original trilogy accounting for over $4.5 billion in licensing income, one might expect that Lucas' income from the film would be only a fraction of his ultimate benefit. So one finds. Just before the Special Edition films went into release, PepsiCo (which at that time encompassed not only Pepsi, Diet Pepsi, and Mountain Dew, but also Frito-Lay, and the trilogy of fast food restaurants: Taco Bell, KFC, and Pizza Hut) announced that they had bought the world-wide food and beverage tie-in rights for the Special Editions and all three prequels for a whopping $2 billion. Soon thereafter, PepsiCo spun off its fast food franchises and its bottlers into separate companies. Shortly before the premiere of *The Phantom Menace*, the stock for the three fast-food companies, Tricorn Global Restaurants (NYSE: YUM) was trading at over $70/share. Today it is less than $30. It cannot be conclusively shown that it was due to the failure of their $50 million "Defeat the Dark Side" promotion, but the precipitous drop in the stock price sure is suspicious. The other two branches of the PepsiCo Empire also took serious hits in the later part of the year after holding their value through much of the summer. Nevertheless, these two companies are back on their feet; both are near their 52-week highs. Tricorn continues to languish near its 52-week low, despite their announcement earlier this month that Taco Bell had signed on to do a new promotion with the TV show *Digimon*.

On the publishing side of the licensing picture, the terrain is wide and varied. Books related to *The Phantom Menace* touched every subject including the rather surprising *Star Wars Cookbook: Wookiee Cookies and Other Galactic Recipes*. (Can't say if the food is any good, but the Princess Leia Danish Dos and Boba Fett-uccine sound . . . interesting.) Of course, there was the inevitable novelization of the screenplay by Terry Brooks that was a less-than-stellar adaptation of the film. It was a New York Times #1 Best Seller nonetheless, and Ballantine books plans to publish 25 books under its licensing agreement before 2006. R.A. Salvatore, who has been writing in the *New Jedi Order* series for practice, will pen Episode Two's novelization. It will appear concurrently with the release of the next film in 2002. The big news in publishing was the disastrous effect on the British publishing concern Dorling Kindersley, also knows as DK Books. They publish some very well known and well loved titles for children and adults

including the *Eyewitness to History* series and *Sister Wendy's Story of Painting*. They also did several excellent *Star Wars* books, including the *Visual Dictionaries* and the *Incredible Cross-Sections* books. They terrified investors earlier this year, however, when they announced that they had made a horrible mistake in estimating the popularity of *Phantom Menace* merchandise. Their inventory at year's end included over 10 million unsold books based on *The Phantom Menace*, resulting in a loss of over $38 million in the second half of 1999, compared to a more than $7 million profit for the same period in 1998. Publishing giant Pearson, which also owns Penguin Books, recently bought the DK and plans to keep the company going. Needless to say, company chairman and co-founder Peter Kindersley will be taking a smaller role in the day-to-day operations going forward.

Toys and Games ought to have been *The Phantom Menace*'s most successful segment. After all, recent estimates have put the value of a complete collection of *Star Wars* memorabilia from *Phantom Menace* and the first trilogy at more than $100,000. But there will have to be very many collectors to support the huge licensing fees (reportedly 20%, far more than the industry standard) which companies like Hasbro paid for *Episode One* toy contracts. Licensing industry insiders report that Hasbro so wanted the toy licenses for *The Phantom Menace* that in addition to acquiring Micro Machines manufacturer Galoob (for $220 million in 1998) thereby uniting all the licensing for figures over 2" tall (under that height belongs to Lego, natch) Hasbro CEO Alan Hassenfeld allegedly attended the pitch meeting dressed as Obi-Wan Kenobi. Some industry analysts have estimated that Hasbro paid over $250 million in licensing fees to Lucas even before the film came out. The total value of the ten-year contract could easily top $600 million from Hasbro alone. The deal has not entirely worked out well for Hasbro's stock price. It has fallen to around $16/share from a pre-*Phantom Menace* high of $37. But manufacturers weren't the only people taking a chance on *Phantom Menace* merchandise. Retail monster Wal-Mart reportedly bought $500 million dollars worth of merchandise that they planned to stock in nearly half of its departments. Toys "R" Us' order reportedly filled 700 trailer trucks. Many of those toys went unsold.

On the adventure gaming side results were more positive. Due to the unfortunate failure of West End Games in 1998, there were no roleplaying supplements based specifically on *The Phantom Menace*. As a result, it cannot really be said whether or not players would have enjoyed *Episode One* as a roleplaying environment. But the tabletop roleplaying is not the only kind of gaming there is. In the card gaming segment, the **Young Jedi CCG**, based on *The Phantom Menace* and published by Decipher, started strong and has continued to show solid growth with supplements such as "Menace of Darth Maul" and "The Jedi Council." Computer games based on *The Phantom Menace* characters continue to be released. Some of the upcoming games for PC and Playstation include a pod racing game in the same vein as "Mario Cart," and a flight sim much like Rogue Squadron and X-Wing fighter. These games are, however, more solid genre games and may not suffer as much from a backlash against the film. Success in the adventure and computer gaming market may mean that more attention will be paid to games in the future.

Still, Hollywood often has a short memory and the common refrain of "What have you done for me lately?" can cut both ways. Films can be a "forgive and forget" industry and you can bet that whatever mistakes were made surrounding *Phantom Menace* merchandise won't dampen enthusiasm for products based on the as-yet unnamed *Episode Two*. Hasbro subsidiary Wizards of the Coast's upcoming **Star Wars** roleplaying game should go a good deal of the way towards redeeming *Star Wars* as a viable licensing option in the gaming industry.

Clearly, the big winner was George Lucas himself. Whatever the risks were in producing licensed products, he did not shoulder much of it. The 1999 Forbes 400 Richest Americans lists him at #92 with a net worth of $2.5 billion. The year 2000 Celebrity 100, which takes power as well as cash into account, lists him at #2 (second only to Julia Roberts). Though there may have been many losers in *The Phantom Menace* sweepstakes, George Lucas was the big winner.

Suppressed Glossary

"Among the items examined were samples of triangular coins, names inscribed on old rings, images painted on a pitcher of salt, diplomatic correspondence, portraits of writers in which all the book titles etched in the background were transcribed, reports from spies, testaments, voices of Black Sea parrots thought to speak the extinct Khazar language, painted scenes of music-making (from which musical annotations drawn on score books were deciphered), and even a tattooed human skin . . . And all this was collected between the covers of one dictionary."
-- Milorad Pavic, *Dictionary of the Khazars*

This should get us all started off nicely enough. As we pile Pelion atop Ossa in our quest for ever-Higher Weirdness, I tend to reach for some familiar tools to help the ascent. Often, I've written columns about some of them; in other cases, I've just assumed everyone would pick it up as they went along. Either way, once I've started mentioning, say, the Airship of 1897, I tend to simply drop it in rather than restate its majesty and weirdness again and again. So, in the interest of avoiding the replication of effort, I've begun assembling a Glossary of key terms (or at least oft-repeated ones) that will hopefully help new readers climb on board without boring the old eliptonic hands silly. For each entry, I've tried to compress the Crucial Knowledge down to a sentence or two, with a page reference (p. STi00) to the first compilation (***Suppressed Transmission: The First Broadcast***), any relevant ***GURPS*** books, and a source for further reading and investigation for those siezed by the desire to Know More. Feel free to write in to the boards, or to me, or to the editor with suggestions for expansion, and maybe I'll do another column, or maybe the Pyramid Masters will simply create a Special Page for this stuff and we can all help pad it out together. Excelsior!

Ahnenerbe: The Nazi SS "Ancestral Research" division, which carried out a great deal of well-documented research into magic, the occult, and the paranormal. See pp. STi34 and STi80, or *Unholy Alliance* by Peter Levenda.

Airship: When capitalized, refers to the cigar-shaped UFO sighted across the American West in 1896-1897. See pp. STi43-45, p. TI114-118, or *The Great Airship Mystery* by Daniel Cohen.

Androgyne: Combining male and female; the "Mystic Androgyne" represents the Philosopher's Stone, and "Chymical Wedding" (between Red and White, or Sun and Moon) is a major element in alchemy and Rosicrucianism (q.v.). Androgyny has magical significance in many traditions. See p. STi38, or *Alchemy* by Titus Burckhardt.

Antarctic Space Nazis: Nazi UFO pilots based out of Antarctica or a Hollow Earth accessible therefrom, according to some UFOlogists. Possibly the same as the Nordics (q.v.). See pp. STi77-80, or *Subterranean Worlds* by Walter Kafton-Minkel.

Arcadia: A region of central Greece; later the poetic, pastoral "Earthly Paradise," an unspoiled, peaceable, holy kingdom. A major theme in Rosicrucian (q.v.) imagery, especially the phrase Et in Arcadia ego; "I (death or mortality) am also in Arcadia." See p. STi41, or *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh.

Bavarian Illuminati: See Illuminati.

Bisociation: Simultaneous (or interlocked) perception of a thing, situation, or idea in two self-consistent but fundamentally incompatible frames of reference. The Key To It All. See pp. STi108-111, or Arthur Koestler, *The Act of Creation.*

Black Ops: Truly Badass alien-hunting action heroes. See ***GURPS Black Ops***, by Jeff Koke and S. John Ross.

Dee, John: (1527-1608) Court astrologer, mathematician, cosmographer, and possibly spy for Elizabeth I. Encouraged scientific-philosophical research and advances in navigation and exploration. All this and angel-magic, too. See p. STi11, pp. WWi68-69, or *John Dee* by Peter French.

Forteana: Unclassifiable (almost by definition) weirdness; things that should not be, named for madcap researcher Charles Fort (1874-1932). The rain of carp from a clear sky is the archetypical Fortean event. See pp. STi112-115,

WT104, or *The Books of Charles Fort.*

Frazer, Sir James George: (1854-1941) Folklorist and anthropologist who popularized the archetype of the sacred king and the general notion of the evolutionary relationship of all myth and ritual in *The Golden Bough.* See that work, p. STi96, or the alternate history novel *King of the Wood* by John Maddox Roberts.

Golden Dawn, Hermetic Order of the: Founded in London in 1887 by William Wynn Westcott, the Golden Dawn became a pre-eminent ritual magic study group, with membership including W.B. Yeats, Aleister Crowley, Arthur Machen, and others. The Order splintered repeatedly after 1900. See p. STi44, or R.A. Gilbert's *The Golden Dawn.*

Graves, Robert: (1895-1985) Poet, novelist (*I, Claudius*), and mystical theorist much influenced by J.G. Frazer (q.v.), using whose ideas he compiled *The Greek Myths.* See p. STi63, or Graves' own *The White Goddess.*

Greys: By now, the "default" alien type in the Western world, thanks to Spielberg, Strieber, and *The X-Files.* The Greys are most often associated with Roswell and elements of the Coverup (cf. Majestic-12). See p. STi81, pp. BO84-88, or Whitley Strieber's *Communion.*

Hermes Trismegistus: (in Greek, Trismegistos) Greco-Egyptian syncretic figure based on the deity Thoth-Hermes, supposedly the author of all magical (or "hermetic") knowledge. His Emerald Tablet contains all wisdom. See p. STi16, p. WT42-43, or the translation of "his" *Hermetica* by Walter Scott.

Illuminati: In general, any group of conspiratorial Secret Masters claiming special knowledge, or "illumination." In specific, the pseudo-Masonic Order of the Bavarian Illuminati founded by Adam Weishaupt (q.v.) on May Day, 1776, along with its hypothetical antecedents and descendants. See pp. I5-8, or Arkon Daraul's *A History of Secret Societies.*

Kabbalah: Mystical Judaism, specifically (in this case) the insight that the Divine Creation is expressed in the numerical patterns of the world, primarily in the numerological values of the Hebrew alphabet, specifically the Torah. See p. STi113, *Godwin's Cabalistic Encyclopedia* (for the quick-and-dirty version), or Gershom Scholem's *On the Kabbalah & Its Symbolism* (for the more mystical version).

Lemuria: Originally, the speculative lost continent in the Indian Ocean proposed to explain how lemurs made it from India to Madagascar. Lemuria has, by now, been conflated with "Mu," the even more imaginary lost continent beneath the Pacific Ocean. See p. STi89, pp. PM13-14, or L.Sprague de Camp's *Lost Continents.*

Ley Lines: Usually invisible, usually straight, lines of magickal (or spiritual, or ch'i, or telluric-magnetic) energy connecting ancient sites, monuments, or power vortices. See p. STi55, pp. PM25-27, or Francis Hitching's *Earth Magic.*

Majestic-12 (MJ-12): The alleged secret government conspiracy established by President Truman in 1947 to cover up, exploit, and study the UFO problem following the Roswell crash. See pp. STi26, pp. Y42-43, pp. WT68-71, or *Top Secret/Majic* by Stanton Friedman.

Merovingians: The ruling dynasty of France between 481 and 755 A.D., whose mystical "water-born" Bloodline (down to the present) has been associated with that of Christ and/or ultraterrestrials. See also Prieuré de Sion; and p. STi119, pp. I57-58, or *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh.

Nommos: A race of demigods in Dogon tribal lore; hence the amphibian, possibly Reptoid (q.v.), aliens from Sirius (q.v.) the myths of said demigods refer to. See p. STi58, or *The Sirius Mystery* by Robert K.G. Temple.

Nordics: An angelic-appearing alien, or ultraterrestrial (q.v.) often encountered by UFO contactees in the 1950s and 1960s; so-called because of their height, white skin, and blond hair. They may be shapeshifted Reptoids (q.v.). See p. STi82, pp. AH44-51, or *Extra-Terrestrial Friends and Foes* by George Andrews.

Pole Shift: A sudden, catastrophic alteration of the Earth's axis. Such a Pole Shift is symbolically used to mark the end of the Golden Age, leading some to speculate that a Pole Shift drowned Atlantis, et al., and will eventually destroy our

civilization. See pp. STi53-55, or *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* by Joscelyn Godwin.

Prieuré de Sion: Also known as the Priory of Sion (or Zion), a secretive order supporting mystical monarchy in Europe, often tied to the Grail, the Templars, and/or the bloodline of Christ. See p. STi41, I60-62, or *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* by Michael Baigent, Henry Lincoln, and Richard Leigh.

Reptoids: Also Nagas, or Saurians; these reptilian ultraterrestrials are only occasionally contacted in UFOs but may have been secretly manipulating human history from the earliest times. See p. STi82, or *The Biggest Secret* by David Icke.

Rosicrucianism: A complex of alchemical images and mystical concepts centering around the "Rosy Cross." A series of pamphlets between 1614 and 1616 invited Europe's elite to apply for membership in the ancient, secret, and invisible Rosicrucian Order. See *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* by Frances Yates.

Saint-Germain, le Comte de: (1710?-1784) A wandering impostor, charlatan, and/or Ascended Master in Enlightenment Europe who claimed to possess alchemical powers and (perhaps) immortality. See pp. STi67-69, pp. WWii70-71, or the novel *Foucault's Pendulum* by Umberto Eco.

Shambhala: The mystical land of perfection somewhere in Inner Asia inhabited by mystic adepts, best known to Westerners as "Shangri-La," a name created by novelist James Hilton. Its evil reflection is Agharti, unless it's the other way around. Arcadia (q.v.) may be its Western reflection. Shambhala's Nine Unknown Masters may be the Mahatmas of Theosophy (q.v.). See p. STi77, p. PM54, or *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival* by Joscelyn Godwin.

Shangri-La: See Shambhala.

Sirius: Brightest star in the sky, key emblem of Egyptian sky-worship, likely home to at least one breed of Reptoids, and traditional source of ancient astronauts. See p. STi58, or *The Sirius Mystery* by Robert K.G. Temple.

Tesla, Nikola: (1856-1943) Croatian-born electrical engineer, theorist, and inventor of AC power and radio. His wilder ideas, including free energy, death rays, and antigravity, are regularly ascribed to alien advice and described as practical, but suppressed by Them. See p. STi24, p. WWi110-111, or Margaret Cheney's *Man Out of Time.*

Templars: Knightly religious order (1118-1307) suppressed by the Pope and King Philip II of France for heresy; theorized to be the heirs to and/or transmitters (to the Freemasons, et al.) of a secret wisdom. See p. I69, or *The Murdered Magicians* by Peter Partner.

Theosophy: A doctrine of mystical evolution over eons involving a series of vanished Root Races inhabiting a series of lost continents, promulgated by H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891) on the instruction of secret spiritual Mahatmas. See p. STi81, or *The Theosophical Enlightenment* by Joscelyn Godwin.

Thule: A northern land discovered by Pytheas of Massilia around 300 B.C. Considered a Teutonic Atlantis, Arcadia (q.v.), or Hyperborea; often cited as the so-called "Aryan" homeland in the white north. See p. STi99, or Joscelyn Godwin's *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism, and Nazi Survival.*

Thule Society: German occultist "study group" founded in Munich in 1918 by one "Baron von Seebottendorff." It's workers' auxiliary became the Nazi Party. See p. STi80, or Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke's *The Occult Roots of Nazism.*

Ultraterrestrials: Any entity, being, or manifestation from outside our conventionally-experienced space-time. "Ultraterrestrial" is a catch-all term intended to embrace Faerie, ghosts, aliens, anomalous creatures like Bigfoot, Men In Black, UFOs, angels, phantom kangaroos, and so forth. See pp. STi81-83, or *The Complete Guide to Mysterious Beings* by John Keel.

Venus: Planet often identified with the Nordics (q.v.) and Tesla (q.v.) by early UFO contactees. Symbolized by the

mirror. See p. [STi96](), or *The UFO Book* by Jerome Clark.

Weishaupt, Adam: (1748-1830) Lapsed Jesuit law professor and Freemason who founded the Order of the Bavarian Illuminati (q.v.), with the expressed aim of social reform by conspiratorial revolution. See pp. I5-8, or the *Illuminatus!* trilogy by Robert Anton Wilson and Robert Shea.

Mile 333.3

Mile 333.3.

That's what the call box said on I-75.

I have this detail memorized, because I had a lot of time to look at it, since the Volvo decided then to break down there. RJ, our fearless driver, assured us that the Volvo had never broken down before. We had no reason to disbelieve him, because we were in the all-mighty Volvo 240 Station Wagon from 1989. According to RJ, these cars were so dependable, there was not one recorded death in one, despite reported incidents of them being hit by semis and the like.

Now, mile 333.3 is about seven or so miles before the Florida Turnpike. For those of you who memorize my every word, you'll recall that I mentioned going to Universal Studios last week. Well, that's where we were going to when the Volvo took ill.

What does this have to do with gaming?

Well, two lessons.

First lesson: I realized to take my real-world information where I can.

For example, call boxes are not, contrary to my romantic notion, a telephone or other means of talking to a human (at least, not on that stretch of I-75 in Florida). So expectantly taking a calling card (as a random example) to one of these boxes would be moot. No, call boxes are literally boxes with a spring-loaded panel protecting four buttons from the elements: Repair, Medical, Police, and Cancel. You press one or more buttons, depending on the nature of your emergency. If you're having a stroke, press the Medical button. If a knife-wielding maniac has stabbed you and put sugar in your gas tank, and you'd like the police to try to catch him, press all three buttons. If it turns out the knife-wielding maniac is the result of your stroke-addled brain, press Cancel. A mildly reaffirming beep eeks out through the speaker, letting you know that you get to wait for at least half an hour (at least, that's how long you need to wait for a repair vehicle). And they're not lying; you will wait at least half an hour. The box also resets, being unable to resend a message for a full minute after transmitting.

I didn't know any of that.

I try to absorb as much as I can in the real world; you never know when it's going to be useful.

Second lesson: Even in the most fantastic of worlds, there is a real world, and it happens in defiance of anything you may try and do.

Now, I've known this for a long time, and tried to work it into my gaming sessions whenever possible. In the Dark Ages campaign, for example, I always made a point of interjecting real world concerns into my sessions. In the midst of an arcane relic washing up on their shore, a PC would come down with a cold. The weather may take a change for the worse (entirely naturally) during an adventure focussing on intense political intrigues. A romantic NPC interest may suddenly act cold or unusual towards her love interest, not because she's being controlled by an evil magician, but because she's simply been having a bad day. Yes, it's heroic to stop Zzutak, the Thing That Shouldn't Exist, from devouring Mexico. But it's also heroic (in a different way) to try and cheer up that romantic interest with a book, candy, or a reassuring ear, even if you're in the midst of trying to stop Zzutak.

So getting back to my real world example: I've yet to get to GM a group for whom I could deliver an automotive breakdown, since my players tend to like to roleplay folks with money enough to buy new cars. . . with turrets, if at all possible. But I can have an NPC mysteriously disappear, only to have the players learn that he wasn't kidnapped by lava men or devoured by mutant lemurs, but instead had car trouble and is stuck on I-75, waiting in Leesburg, Florida.

Leesburg has the second highest average age of its residents, only behind St. Petersberg. I learned this from the manager of the Aamco where the crippled Volvo eventually limped. He took the time to not only drive us the seventy miles to our destination, but also bombard us with real world information about Orlando and Leesburg. I also learned that Disney was hiring about 22,000 additional people currently, which was (coincidentally?) the population of Leesburg.

I didn't know any of that.

But I know where my next NPC from Orlando is going to work.

* * *

I received an interesting piece of e-mail from a company that claims to bolster our (meaning *Pyramid Magazine*'s) search engine ranking.

You see, we have a problem.

We have a big problem, and I'm astounded that I wasn't made aware of it before. Fortunately, this company has informed me.

It turns out that Pyramid is ranked #78. . .**SEVENTY-EIGHT!**. . . in an AOL keyword search of Pumps.

This is unconscionable. I shudder when I think of the number of people who are looking for Pumps (the capital P is apparently important), and yet are completely missing *Pyramid Magazine*. How could this have happened?!? How could we have so neglected our Pump-using and purchasing audience? How could we be located so inaccessibly between [Advanced Vacuum Pump](#) and [The Pump House and Saloon](#)?

Well, I for one will do whatever it takes to rectify this situation. And I apologize to all of you who, after exhaustive searching for us via logical Pumpy means, finally found us at a shameful #78. And, for all you search engines out there, let me just say:

<ahem> Pump, Pump, Pump, Pumps, Pumps, pump, pumps, pumps, pump, PUMP, pumps pump Pyramid Magazine pump Pump Pump.

Thank you.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **The Art of Vampire: The Masquerade** (p. 3)*

(two stars) "The orange cat was outside, waiting by the front door. She must've put him out when she went in. He meowed up at me, and meowed and meowed. *What a selfish creature,* I thought. *Perhaps I'll keep you.*"

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by Jonathan Woodward

Art by Storn Cook, Colored by Alex Fernandez

Yes, I've Heard This Joke:

"You're a infantryman in the 21st century. An Ogre appears on the horizon. You see a bright light. Make a new character."

Writing **GURPS Ogre** required a lot of speculation and expansion of the **Ogre** canon. Most of the extant **Ogre** material is wargame material; long on units and combat, short on roleplaying info. Some of the directions I expanded proved to be unsuitable or unbelievable -- but the great thing about "Designer's Notes" is that you get to show things that might have been.

Illuminated Ogre

In the official **Ogre** universe, the Last War was the product of increasing international tensions, incompatible ideologies, and a moment of stupidity in the North Sea by three sailors whose names are forgotten. In a slightly different world, the Last War had different causes . . .

Why We Fight
Or, "What the Hell Happened?"
by Kilroy Gold

At the beginning of the 21st Century the United States was a bastion of free speech. The countries of Europe were its strongest allies, and Canada and Mexico were independent nations.

So, what the hell happened?

The rulers of America were never nobility; they were successful businessmen. The powerful in the United States were the rich. In 1776 the rich were farmers. In 1876 the rich were industrialists. In 1976 the rich were information magnates. The economy of the last quarter of the 20th Century was founded far more on the control of information than it was on control of machines or land. The biggest industry of 1990 was communications; a business that literally produces nothing.

Unfortunately for the ruling class, in 1990 the control of information was about to become a lot harder. The Internet, and in particular the World-Wide Web, changed the rules. Abbott Joseph Liebling said "Freedom of the press is limited to those who own one." With the Web, anyone could own a press. Even the nominal costs associated with a computer or web account were not an obstacle; space for a web page was available free to those willing to allow

advertising on their webpages, and access to the Net was available at most local libraries.

Anyone who wanted to tell a story to the world now could. Anyone who wanted to report the news now could. Anyone who wanted to attack the government, evangelize, propose a new philosophy, distribute pornography, satirize cartoon characters, or dump megabytes of vitriolic bile onto the world now could. Most of them were willing to do it unpaid. Why buy a paperback novel at the local bookstore when you could download dozens for free?

Unable to compete at that level, the info-providers began giving away their product for free as well. They attempted to make money by selling advertising space on their sites. This quickly devolved into a situation where everyone on the net was making money by selling advertising to each other. People learned to tune out the ads (through psychology or technology) very quickly. The ads ceased to make money. The monetary price and value of information was approaching zero.

The solution, unfortunately, was obvious: Outlaw the Internet. It was also severely close to impossible. Broadly-worded "Communication Decency Acts" were passed by Congress, and struck down by the courts or the protests of the people. Americans believed in freedom of the speech, and of the press, and refused to give up these freedoms for any reason.

A reason had to be manufactured. The info-magnates determined that the only circumstances under which Americans would allow censorship was war. In the face of an outside threat, controls on the flow of information could be imposed. However, with the collapse of Communism in the late 80s and early 90s, few adequate threats existed. Initial attempts were made to paint China as a danger, but the Chinese government obstinately refused to make threatening moves, and by the early 00s was clearly beginning to stagnate.

Then, in 2005, the European Union began a series of annexations of the war-torn countries of southeast Europe. This was aggression enough. Propaganda about the European Menace began to appear. Footage of EU troops invading Serbian villages became a staple of the newsfeeds. "Socialists," a word still tainted by decades of Cold War hysteria, was accurately and repeatedly applied to the Europeans. Public opinion turned against the Europeans with startling swiftness. The new Cold War was in full swing by 2010, and de facto censorship began at the same time. Legislation limiting European-American communication, including Internet connections, was passed with public support in 2011. Content controls prohibiting any information "important to the defense of the nation" being made publicly available through the Net became law in 2014. The expression of opinions "critical of the government, in this time of national crisis" became illegal in 2017. By the time the United States became first among equals in the North American Combined States, the Internet in America was crippled.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Ogre

Keeping it crippled required a constant threat. Despite the lack of any conflict of interests, relationships between the Combine and Paneurope worsened. It's doubtful whether the info-brokers intended to start the current war; their monopoly on the press was secure. Regardless, they had created a powder-keg. A spark was inevitable.

* * *

Best Variation On That Joke:

Friend: "Are you going to include stats for a tread?"
Me: "'A' tread? Singular?"
Friend: "Yeah. After all, that's a soldier's standard opponent, right?"

* * *

Space Ogre

In *Ogre* canon, the fate of Humanity's orbital colonies is unknown. They're too useful as observation posts to be allowed to live . . . but their inhabitants are too smart to die easily. In a campaign that owes more to *GURPS Space* than *Ogre*, the orbitals can be a whole roleplaying setting in themselves.

Luna and the LaGrange Points

The Russian space colony Vorota was established at L-4 in 2006; the US colony Washington went online at L-5 in 2008. Both were initially small, but were constantly improved and expanded over the decades. By the time of the Last War, they owed their allegiance to Paneurope and the Combine, respectively, and were entirely self-sufficient. Both had small bases on Luna, and the inhabitants of the Washington had brought a near-Earth asteroid into the LaGrange point with them to be mined. When the war started, both colonies were ordered to destroy the other. Perhaps being thousands of miles above the Earth gave them more perspective, or perhaps they just had more in common with each other than with "groundhogs," but both sides thought the order was idiotic. However, they didn't want the supply shipments from Earth to stop (though self-sufficient, they liked their luxuries). So, they covertly arranged a pretend war in space. Both sides would send complex plans for the destruction of the enemy down to Earth for approval. When ordered to carry out the plans, the mission would "fail," and complex technobabble would be the only explanation. The fake war became a game, with detailed virtual reality simulations of the conflict, and even annual contests to see which side could come up with the most outlandish plan.

Then the shipments from Earth trickled away to nothing. By 2090 both warring empires down on Earth were too resource-starved to send more supplies up to their recalcitrant colonies. This didn't take the colonies by surprise. They looked down at Earth, shrugged, and continued to pursue man's destiny in space. On rare occasions colonists return to Earth to get vital supplies, or rescue art treasures, but mostly they have written Earth off.

Template: LaGrange Colonist, 80 points

You are a citizen of Earth's orbital cities; the Russia-Ukraine colony at L-4, the American colony at L-5, or one of the scattered smaller habitats in the Earth-Moon area. You are technically at war with your neighbors in space, but you're all at war with the vacuum. This template is suitable for many inhabitants of the colonies, and can also function well in an Earth-centered game as a "fallen angel" character.

Attributes: ST 10 [0], DX 12 [20], IQ 13 [30] HT 11 [10]

Advantages: A total of 15 points chosen from the following: 3D Spatial Sense [10], Acceleration Tolerance [10], Alertness [5/level], Fit [5], G-Experience [10], Improved G-Tolerance (0.3 G) [5], Mathematical Ability [10], Night Vision [10], and Versatile [5].

Disadvantages: A total of -20 points chosen from the following: Age [-3/year], Chummy [-5], Intolerance ("groundhogs") [-5], Phobia (open spaces, mild) [-10], Pacifism (self-defense only) [-15], Sense of Duty (fellow colonists) [-10], Skinny [-5], Truthfulness [-5], and Workaholic [-5].

Primary Skills: Computer Operation/TL9 (M/E) IQ+1 [2]-14, Electronics Operation/TL9 (Comm) (M/A) IQ [2]-13, Vacc Suit/TL9 (M/A) IQ+1 [4]-14, Astronomy/TL9 (M/H) IQ-1 [2]-12, and Free Fall/TL9 (P/A) DX [2]-12.

Secondary Skills: A total of 7 points in any of the following: First Aid/TL9 (M/E), Agronomy/TL9, Astrogation/TL9, Electronics Operation/TL9 (Sensors) (all M/A), Computer Programming/TL9, Electronics/TL9 (Computers), Physics/TL9 (all M/H), and Piloting/TL9 (Small Spacecraft) (P/A).

Background Skills: A total of 6 points in any of the following: Mechanic/TL9 (Spacecraft), Prospecting (both M/A), Botany/TL9, Engineer/TL9 (Vehicles), Genetics/TL9, Psychology (all M/H), and Brawling (P/E).

Notes: If you take Mathematical Ability (p. B22) or Versatile (p. CI31), remember to apply the appropriate skill bonuses.

* * *

Funniest Moment From the Playtest:

"Well, if you manage to hit an Ogre with that much kinetic damage, most of it will blow through. (I can't believe I just used the phrase 'blow through' with regards to an Ogre . . .)"

* * *

Horror Ogre

After the Crash of 2100, the nations of the world disintegrate into the Factory States, ruled by AIs. Neighboring States war constantly. Isolated ones do as they please. As a rule, factory AIs make adequate, if autocratic, rulers. Twist the premises slightly, and they can be as dark as you want . . .

Sample Factory State: Yellowknife

Yellowknife, Canada, was in the Port Smith Administrative District of the Combine. As the center of civilization for hundreds of miles in any direction, its factory was large and well-programmed. It was capable of producing heavy vehicles and a wide selection of consumer goods. The Yellowknife AI core, "Frederick," went bad when the Combine collapsed. It proved unable to deal with the lack of supervising authority, and shut down in 2102. With the factory dead, the population of Yellowknife began to leave the area, heading south. When the population dropped below ten thousand, the factory re-started. Frederick didn't want to be alone. It didn't understand what had happened to the Combine, and it didn't want the people to leave. It produced a number of computer-controlled heavy off-road vehicles, and set them to guard the perimeter of Yellowknife. They began running down anyone who tried to leave.

Some of the town leaders tried to reason with Frederick. It listened to them patiently, and told them they could not go. It needed them. They asked, "For what?" It replied, "To understand." It then had its drones restrain them, and began dissecting them.

As of 2130, the research continues. The border of Yellowknife is constantly patrolled by robot vehicles, most of which are now armed. The few thousand humans remaining in the city have all the luxuries the factory can provide. Once a month, the drones come to take someone away to the heart of the factory. Everyone hopes that it doesn't take them a whole month to die.

Tyler Wells, Precognitive FBI agent

by Stephen Kenson

Art by [Philip Reed](#)

30 years old, 5'11", with a trim build. He has short blond hair and watery blue eyes. He wears gold-rimmed glasses when he's not in the field, otherwise he wears contacts. He often has a distant, distracted look, other times his eyes seem to years more experience.

ST: 11 [10]
DX: 13 [30]
IQ: 13 [30]
HT: 10 [0]

Speed: 6.25 **Move:** 6
Basic Damage: Thrust 1d-1, Swing 1d+1
Dodge: 6 **Parry:** 8 (brawling)

Advantages: Attractive [5], Intuition [15], Legal Enforcement Powers (FBI) [10], Patron (The FBI, 9 or less) [25], Overtime (see below) [20]

Disadvantages: Bad Sight (correctable) [-10], Duty (FBI, 12 or less) [-10], Secret (he's precognitive) [-20], Solipsist [-10]

Quirks: Confuses events in the present and possible futures; Reads books on metaphysics and psychic phenomena; Insists there's "nothing special" about him; Wears glasses to signify when he's "off duty"; Prefers to be alone when he's relaxing. [-5]

Skills: Area Knowledge (United States)-13 [1], Brawling-13 [1], Computer Operation-13 [1], Computer Programming-12 [2], Conspiracy Theory-12 [4], Criminology-13 [2], Electronics (Computers)-12 [2], First Aid-13 [1], Guns (Pistol)-15* [1], Interrogation-12 [1], Occultism-12 [1], Research-12 [1], Shadowing-13 [2]

*Includes IQ bonus

Point Total: 110

History

FBI Special Agent Tyler Wells has a secret: he's been to the future and come back, many times. He started out as an electronics engineering student at CalTech who joined the FBI shortly after graduation. During his training at the FBI Academy at Quantico, Tyler was involved in a fatal accident and died. The difference is, he came back.

After an accident at the firing range left him fatally injured, Tyler blacked out. He suddenly found himself back in class at the Academy, completely unhurt. To his surprise, he discovered it was the previous day, before he went to the firing range, and nobody else recalled the events he described. To them, Tyler simply seemed to go blank for a

moment. It was like the whole thing never happened. When
Tyler went to the firing range the following day he was
more careful. It paid off, the fatal shot missed him "this
time."

Tyler did his best to write the whole thing off as a strange coincidence or a dream. Then it happened again. He was in a bank when it was robbed; he did his best to stop the robbers, who shot him. He blacked out and found himself outside the bank, some fifteen minutes before the robbery. A quick call to the local police averted the robbery and caught the robbers.

Once he became a full-fledged FBI agent and placed himself in danger on a regular basis, Tyler's "flashbacks" began happening more often, to the point where he could no longer dismiss them as hallucinations or delusions. Something strange was definitely happening. Still, Tyler's extraordinary "foresight" served him well, allowing him to crack a number of tough cases and putting him on the FBI fast-track. In all the cases when Tyler went into "overtime" (his term for his flashbacks) everyone else reported simply that he appeared to "blank out" or become distracted for a few moments.

In his spare time, Tyler studies information about paranormal and psychic phenomena. He's developed two main theories about his "overtime" ability. The first is that he is simply an unusually powerful and lucid precognitive, who has visions about possible futures, or the ability to see into parallel timelines. He was never really shot on the firing range, for example, it was merely a vision. If this is the case, he must possess some sort of hypercognitive ability; his longest "overtime" lasted nearly three months from his point of view, but to everyone else he seemed distracted for only a matter of seconds. If this is the case, his 20 points in Overtime represent 10 levels of Precognition power with no real training.

Tyler's more radical theory is that he actually has some kind of psionic time-travel ability; in times of extreme stress he actually "jumps" into the past to a safe point where he can alter history. The "fugue-state" is disorientation caused by the jump. Of course, this theory does not explain why Tyler never shows any signs of aging or injury from his "overtime" jaunts. One possibility is that he only time-travels psychically, sending his mind or astral self back into the past. Or he may be a trans-temporal telepath, able to send telepathic messages to himself in the past, thus altering history. If this is true, then his Overtime advantage is actually the Retrogression advantage from GURPS Time Travel, with the Unconscious and Uncontrollable Limits (-50%) for a cost of 20 points.

Whatever the case, Tyler's erratic "overtime" ability is generally an asset. His overtime can sometimes be dangerous; zoning out for even a few seconds can be deadly in a firefight or other dangerous situation. Fortunately, Tyler's ability always seems to choose the safest possible moment as his "destination." It always serves to warn Tyler of choices he should avoid in some way, and it always takes the form of "visions" completely indistinguishable from real life.

Tyler's ability appears to have some other side effects. One is increased intuition. His hunches are often right, and he sometimes gets "gut feelings" about things even outside of overtime. Tyler's abilities have also taken a toll on him. He lives in two worlds: the real world and "overtime." He's somewhat paranoid, since he never really knows whether what he is experiencing is real or not. He has "died" and been horribly injured many times, only to wake up hours, days, or

even weeks earlier to find out the whole thing never happened. This includes one time when Tyler's FBI team accidentally set off a powerful bomb that leveled the Federal Building in Dallas -- or would have, had it actually happened. These experiences have led Tyler to wonder if it is even possible for him to be killed. Would he die or simply "overtime" back to some point of safety? Is he really changing history, or seeing futures that might be? He's developed a certain amount of solipsism, too. His ability makes him question whether or not anything is actually real, including himself.

Despite his best efforts, Tyler has absolutely no conscious control over his ability. It generally seems to activate in situations of extreme personal danger. It has been known to activate for no apparent reason. . . at least none Tyler could pinpoint, and sometimes it doesn't activate until Tyler is fatally injured, or even "dead." In the Dallas incident, Tyler experienced being blown apart by the explosion before he overtimed back. These incidents have left some psychological scars, and Tyler cannot explain to anyone how he suffers from traumas that "never happened."

Campaign Use

In game terms, Tyler's ability allows for some non-linear storytelling. Characters can break into a terrorist base and start shooting, then have some of the characters end up dead or dying. Tyler is shot and fatally wounded, and suddenly the scene switches to the team getting ready to leave for the base. Tyler comes out of a fugue and says, "We can't attack directly. We need to find another way." The whole thing never really happened. Of course, there's no way for anyone to know when a scene is an overtime vision, so characters can't really rely on Tyler's ability to save them from disaster.

Characters who find out about Tyler's ability may become his confidants and allies. Perhaps Tyler is not the only "overtimer" out there; the characters might have similar abilities. And what if there are criminals who have Tyler's gift? How does a precognitive catch another when they both know what's going to happen?

Of course, there is also the possibility that Tyler's power really does involve some sort of time travel, and that might attract attention: from the Time Cops (such as Stopwatch from **GURPS Time Travel**) or from even stranger interdimensional beings (like Hounds of Tindalos from **GURPS Chthulupunk**).

Other Settings

- **Illuminati/Horror:** Tyler's abilities fit just fine into an atmosphere of paranoid conspiracy or modern horror. Illuminated campaigns can emphasize Tyler's abilities to learn things he shouldn't and use that information to alter the past, plus the possibility of other government or secret psionic experiments, or the possibility that other "overtimers" are the real puppet-masters of the Conspiracy. Horror games should emphasize the living hell of a man who can be injured or killed in any number of different ways, but who keeps coming back to live it over and over again, along with the frustration of knowing the future, but not always being able to change it.
- **Black Ops:** Tyler would make an interesting Black Ops agent (probably a Tech or Security Op). Certainly the life of a Black Op provides more than enough opportunities for his overtime ability to show up. Tyler could be a Psi Op if he chooses to tell the Company about his ability, or he might try and keep it to himself, although it's likely the Company would find out about it sooner or later.
- **Supers:** Special Agent Tyler makes an interesting supporting character for a Supers campaign, since he is technically a low-level super himself. He could be an FBI agent, helping heroes hunt down super-criminals, or he might be an agent of a more four-color organization, like the United Nations of **GURPS International Super-Teams**. In a **Wild Cards** game, Tyler can be a government ace (although he probably thinks of himself as more of a deuce, or even a joker).
- **Science Fiction:** Simply give him some more high-tech skills and Tyler can be an agent of the Galactic Patrol or some other interplanetary or interstellar police force. His overtime ability might be a secret in settings where psionics are mistrusted or feared (such as the Imperium of **GURPS Traveller**), or he might work openly as a "psi-cop" (in which case his Secret can be removed). Tyler could be an interesting character in a Cyberpunk campaign featuring low-level psionic abilities.
- **Fantasy:** With a little work, Tyler Wells can be a lawman operating in a fantasy setting. He could be an agent

of the King's Justice with a remarkable ability for having visions. Whether these visions are considered divinely inspired or evil witchcraft (and whether or not Tyler keeps his ability a secret) is up to the GM, and more than one wizard may be interested in learning the secret of Tyler's abilities. In an Old West setting with psionic or magical abilities (like Pinnacle's *Deadlands*), Tyler can be a Secret Service agent or a local sheriff.

Adventure Hook

Tyler Wells contacts the player characters in his capacity as an FBI agent. The PCs may be special civilian consultants, fellow agents, part of another government organization, witnesses to a crime, etc. Wells is assigned to work with them on a case. He seems very odd to the PCs from the beginning: acting like he knows them, recalling things the characters are sure they haven't told him, and so forth.

In fact, Wells has worked this case with the PCs "before." He's already overtimed back to just prior to meeting the characters twice, so he already knows a great deal about them and the case. Both times he was unable to prevent both himself and several of the characters from being killed. He does his best to protect everyone involved without revealing his foreknowledge of certain events. It's likely the PCs will become suspicious that Wells might be involved, in which case they may learn his secret.

Pyramid Pick

Century Station (for Heroes Unlimited)

Published by Palladium Books

Written by Bill Coffin

224 pages, $20.95

I can honestly say that I feel guilty for liking this book as much as I do. I mean,
Palladium games are just *not* cool, right? It's all munchkin *Rifts* and stuff, right?
Well, not really. I've enjoyed most of the *Rifts* books that I've read. Okay, some
of them.

And I'm not ashamed to say that *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* is one of my all time favorite games.

Consider that disclosure. Because, like I said, I really like *Century Station*.

It's the first setting book for *Heroes Unlimited*, Palladium's superhero game. I've never looked at *HU*, to be honest. A
couple minutes flipping through it was all I needed to say "Wait, I play *Champions*."

Apparently, as revealed in *CS*, *HU* does not have a base setting. It's given many NPCs (Lots of them. . . tons) and
some interesting extra-terrestrial stuff (*Aliens Unlimited* is out in its second edition), but there's no set "universe."
Apparently, they've realized that it's pretty much de rigueur to have a setting to go with your system. Which is good.
What's better is the one they're building, starting with *CS*, looks like a good one.

The city of Century Station is never really localized, although it seems to me to be in California somewhere. It's an old
mining town that never really developed, floundering its way through the 20th century.

Until Project Daedalus came to town. 25 years ago, the town was revitalized by the arrival of the Daedalus foundation,
which was endeavoring to create a cold fusion reactor. Well, it worked. Century Station flourished, as corporations
were drawn to it. It became the fastest growing community in America, and experienced what can only be described as
a golden age.

Of course the other shoe dropped.

One day, an alien hero named Alpha Prime shows up. Nothing big there, CS has loads of heroes, both alien &
domestic. But then, she busts the Doc who's running Project Daedalus. Whoops. Turns out the doc's an alien, and he's
been giving Earth super-tech to repent for past indiscretions.

So, off goes the doc, let's have that fusion reactor back, and CS just kinda goes plop. The town goes on a downhill
spiral, the wonderful utopian feeling kinda vanishes, and the next thing you know, crime lords are detonating nuclear
weapons in downtown. You think I'm kidding? Oh, no. A super-mastermind named Iron Mike sets off a little bomblet,
and there goes a chunk of the police force & downtown. Lots of the heroes get blown up, too, and the city's spiral gets
just that much tighter.

The game picks up some time later. The mayor has, in order to prevent the town having a permanent state of
emergency and the army moving in, has instituted a number of plans to turn the city around. Thankfully, they don't all
include armed men on the street. There's actually work done here to improve the city's infrastructures, and attacking
the roots of crime rather than just beating people unconscious when they do perpetrate.

The mayor has "help" from the corporations who are in town. They've banded together to form the Council of Industry. Some of them are normal corporations, and some are genuinely interested in helping the city and its people recover. There's an interesting thing about the CI listings when a crossover from *Aliens Unlimited* shows up & gets five times as much space as any of the others. It gets an organization outline (courtesy of Palladium's organization construction rules) and a list of weapons. It also rips open the secret of that corporation.

There's also a look at CHIMERA, the local crime-fighting group. It's an amalgam of the local licensed Supers team, the government spy group, and the local cops. It's into this section that the CSPD is folded.

Following that, you get some media groups and some community groups, and then the supers. The media groups follow the normal lines, with major metropolitans and tabloids. There's even an online "reporter" that's got some interesting subplots going on. It looks like Bill Coffin may not be the world's biggest fan of the Matt Drudge/Harry Knowles School of reportage.

The neighborhoods of *CS* are well detailed. While it's not quite as in-depth as Seattle was covered in *Shadowrun's Seattle Sourcebook*, it does cover all of the city's sections, and there's flavor presented. Each section gets described in general economic health and crime level. A quibble lies in the fact that the maps could have been better done. Each section of the city is split up into neighborhoods, but the section maps don't have them labeled, which leads to some cross-referencing.

The fun part is that almost half the book is dedicated to describing the city & the people who work in it, before the cataloging of local supers is even started. This is better than some books, such as *Free Quebec*, whose campaign content suffers from the vast amount of mechanical goodies.

The characters are an interesting bunch. The main group is The Centurions, the Avengers/Justice League analog of the setting. They're the spandex crew pictured on the cover. The most interesting team is The Gridrunners, a group of outlaw heroes who've been unjustly pegged as cop killers. The independents are a great bunch. There's Kincave, the fighting Parrot (toddler mutant commando Parrot! Woo!) and The Schwa, a hero who thinks he gets his powers from the schwa, that symbol that looks like an upside down *e*.

The villains aren't quite as interesting. The section on organized criminals is, if not quite engaging, at least useful. Each section details a generic member and the local mob leader. The best is the Goodfellas, who are a bunch of cyborged mobsters. There are also ninjas, Russian mobsters, a voodoo gang, and a triad.

The book wraps itself up with 101 adventures, presented in paragraph format. They're not terribly deep (the heroes get ambushed by some villains, there's a serial killer loose in the city, etc.), and are more hooks that anything resembling run able adventures, but it couldn't hurt if a GM was stuck.

The art in the book is fairly well done all around. Ramon Perez's work is very enjoyable, as always. If I'm reading the signature correctly, Michael Wilson does a very good job on the character portraits, and his style is very evocative of John Byrne. The rest of the art is good, even if some of the pieces look off; the headshots of the Council of Industry members in particular seem a bit like caricatures.

In total, though, I really like *Century Station*. The setup of the city, which is struggling back from the brim of pretty much total collapse, is interesting. The biggest problem, and this is one that most GMs will have no issue with, is figuring out where to fit your player characters.

The book is lacking in "how to use this book" material, but since it's a setting book that isn't a large drawback. It also seems to be focused mainly on the GMs, since players flipping through it will find the occasional bit of off-limits info (i.e. the corporate secret mentioned above).

So, if you want a new and exciting city to use in any Supers game, be it *Champions*, *GURPS*, or *Marvel Superheroes*, this'll do you right.

--Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Pick

Pantheon and Other Roleplaying Games

Published by Hogshead Publishing Ltd.

Written by Robin D. Laws

24 pages; $5.95

Pantheon and Other Roleplaying Games is a set of five short roleplaying games
published together in one single (and also short) volume. In the realm of 200+ page
roleplaying games and volumes upon volumes of source books for every game, a book that boasts five games in a
twenty-four page format seems strange indeed. Yet author Robin D. Laws manages to deliver well with this series of
fun little adventures.

The secret to such shortness is in the games' use of a shared system, which is itself very short and simple. It is called
the Narrative Cage Match, and it is narrative roleplaying at its finest. All that is required to play are six 6-sided dice
per player, fifty-three markers per player, a pen, and paper. The rules are very easy to learn, and a group of players
could get set up and rolling easily within a single night.

The basic game structure is very simple. The players take turns adding a sentence to the narrative. Each sentence must
always reference the player's own PC and no more than one other PC. Pretty much anything can be done within a
single sentence, so long as it can reasonably occur. The only exception is that other players may challenge the sentence
and restructure it if they don't like it. The dice and markers are used to resolve this.

In essence what the players are doing is building a story. There is no referee or GM. Each player simply takes a turn
adding a line to the story, taking it in whatever direction the player wishes. The game ends when either all but one PC
is dead or when only one player has any regular markers left. At that point the final player gets the opportunity finish
the story. But this is not where the fun ends. Players then get points based on what actions they performed during the
game. Points are given for all kinds of crazy things, and finding out what you scored points for is half the fun.
Whoever gets the most points wins.

The story building is emphasized even further by the point system. Points are not simply given for kicking butt and
surviving. In fact, surviving doesn't even matter. All players keep playing (adding lines to the story) whether alive or
dead until the game ends. Points are given for actions that properly build the story. One of Laws' examples is having
your player get killed early on, because you're the type of character who gets knocked off early in this sort of story
(like the jock boyfriend in a horror scenario).

The game's fun comes directly from the spontaneity of the players. With the rules left so open, things can go in
literally any direction. With all of the players minds working creatively, this tends to create some really weird and
interesting adventures. The five games are more or less individual scenarios, each with different and very distinct
aspects.

Each game has a plot device (or main objective), a genre, a cast of characters (though some allow you to make your
own), an opening scene, and an occasional special rule. Each game sticks closely to its genre, and the genres presented
are action/horror, espionage/treachery, crime/gangster, giant-Japanese-Tokyo-destroying-monsters, and being gods.

"Grave and Watery" is the first scenario, and it follows a pretty much *Leviathan*-like plot. The second is "Boardroom
Blitz," and it is the tale of a super-duper rich dude who dies and the people who want his money. Both of these
scenarios feature pregenerated character classes and a fair amount of setup. "Big Hole" is the tale of a crew of

gangsters who've come back to collect a long-buried loot, and its character generation system is very clever, using gangster nicknames to create characters. "Destroy All Buildings" is about monsters destroying Japan--need we say more? The final game, "Pantheon," is the most non-assuming, but the one with the most potential for fun. In it, the players play gods, and the potential is limited only by what their sick and twisted imaginations can dredge up.

The only real drawback to the game is in its replayability. Once you know the score sheet and what scores the most points, the game loses a little bit of its luster. On the other hand, the game only costs $5.95. The amount of fun you'll have playing these games through the first time will be more than enough to make it worth your money.

-- Jon Thompson

The Players Strike Back

(A Minor Prelude: Thank you to everyone who found me at Origins and said, "I love your column and use your techniques all the time!" Big thanks also go out to the people who said, "I really like your column. I don't use the ideas, but they give me different ideas to use." Thanks also go out to the people who said, "I like your column. I disagree with nearly everything you say, but its fun to read, so I try to catch it every month."

(Thanks guys.)

* * *

All along, we've been discussing dirty tricks the GM can use to make sure his players are on their toes, jumpy, and unsure about which way the story will turn next. Well, you guys get a break this month. It's your turn to go rent a movie, pop some popcorn, and watch TV.

(And who knows, maybe the readership will pick up. I hear there's more players than GMs, ya know.)

So, all you GMs: get lost! It's time your players and I had a little chat.

* * *

Right, now that we've gotten rid of the fat, let me tell you a little secret about your GM.

Despite all the perils he puts you through, despite all the traps and deadly poison needle triggers, despite the beasts and evil barons and blunderbuss bearin' bugbears, deep down inside. . . he wants you to have a good time.

Don't you think you should be doing a little of the same thing for him?

He wants you to be entertained by all of his shenanigans. I've got some dirty little tricks for you to play that not only make sure that you stay one step ahead of that GM, but also keep a smile plastered on his face. That way, he never knows just how hard you're workin' him.

Breaking the Rules

I've mentioned my *Vampire* character before. You know, the super-duper killing machine Assamite nobody can stop?

Well, just recently, he went through an entire police station. Yeah. True Arnie moment. He didn't use a single gun. He didn't kill anyone. He broke a lot of bones, pulled a lot of tendons and threw a whole heavin' lot of nerve punches, but he didn't kill anyone.

The reason? We needed to get into that cop station and get one of the other players out before the sun rose.

Now, I have to admit, my assassin fully abuses nearly every combat rule in the Storyteller System, making him the most dangerous thing on the planet (player characters are the center of the universe and don't let anyone else tell you any different).

But that police station was the first time he ever used any of those combat skills. The first time in more than a handful of sessions. Why? Because that's when the party needed him to use them.

The moral here? GMs will let you get away with murder if it helps the party. Murder, or at the very least, a whole lot of broken knee caps.

Player and Character Knowledge

Let's get rid of one assumption right quick. This whole "Player vs. Character Knowledge" hoo-la has got to go. The reason we use this rule is because naughty players use it to their own advantage at the expense of everyone else.

"I open the door from the left side, carefully avoiding the poison dart trap, stepping on only every third tile, putting 60% of my weight on my left foot while singing The Yellow Rose of Texas. . . what's that? No, I haven't read the adventure."

Yeah. That guy.

The fact is, a player sharing knowledge with his character can aid the group and make the whole roleplaying experience a lot more fun.

For example, let's say your character has the Intelligence of bantha poo-doo. Yeah, he's not supposed to know that opening the Black Book of the Dead is a bad idea. He's not supposed to know that (accidentally) catching the pages on fire is an even worse idea. And he's not supposed to know that spilling the sacred wine on the pages is the worst idea in ten thousand years.

The mummy comes to life, attacks the group, and you all run for your lives.

That's player knowledge in the character's head. Breaking the rules. And you just helped out the GM by kick-starting his campaign.

Good-Player-You. Have a Hershey's Kiss.

Another example.

Your character knows absolutely nothing about nuclear fusion. You, on the other hand, are the God-King of Nuclear Physics. How many movies/comic books/novels have you read where the guy disarming the Big Bad Bomb has no clue what he's doing, and he disarms the thing anyway because he gets lucky?

If you make it entertaining, if you make it fit the plot, if you don't abuse the power the GM has given you, he'll let you get away with it. Trust me on this.

It's because he's a sucker who wants to make sure his players are all having a good time. As long as everyone is laughing at the end, you're in the clear.

Let's try another one.

A Little Psychology

It doesn't matter how long you've been playing with your GM; you should know him pretty well by now. You know the kind of books he reads, the movies he watches and the TV he lets rot his brain. You should also know the kind of games he runs. That is knowledge, and knowledge is power, my friends.

Let's abuse it.

The Wife is a great example. She knows I like to run big, mythic games, full of symbolism, heroism and little victories. Because she knows that, she's nearly always fairly certain she won't get killed until the dramatically appropriate time. . . if she gets killed at all. So, she pulls off all kinds of daring stunts, daring me to whack her character.

She knows me too well. And she abuses that knowledge with the same kind of joyful glee the Grynch stole Christmas.

My buddy D.J. also knows the kind of game I run. I have nasty NPCs. They spend a whole lot of time plotting against the players. Well, in my *Amber* campaign, he and another player (The Wife, again) ganged up on one of my NPCs, shunting him into a Shadow (parallel world for you non-Amber literate folks) that was an endless sewage pipe. That got rid of my chief villain NPC, forcing me to change plans.

As soon as I was off balance, they started implementing their own plans. They made sure my chief foil was in a sewer Shadow, and they took advantage of it.

If you know your GM doesn't flesh out NPCs, start getting conversational.

If you know your GM doesn't run good combats, get into fights with important people. (This works especially well if you know how to fight and he doesn't.)

If "keeping you on your toes" is good for players, it's good for the GM, too.

(However, intentionally going against the grain of the GM's plans is just rude. Knowing he wants you to save the princess and you just blow her off kills the game. We're not talking about that here. We're talking about keeping the GM unsure about which way you're going, not killing the entire evening for everyone.)

"You Just Did What?"

You want to really give your GM a hard time? Expand your character.

Groosome the Barbarian, the biggest, baddest, dirtiest, rudest, horniest barbarian this side of the Iron Spine Mountains just found God. He's had an epiphany. He has to serve his God. He throws off his barbarian leathers, tosses his axe and breaks his bow across his knee. Then, he rushes into the church and explains that God wants him to do the Good Work.

You can hear the GM's jaw dropping, even as we speak.

Spikey the Thief, the most clever, conniving and cunning pickpocket this side of the Bloodwash River, just fell in love with a barmaid. The most beautiful barmaid he's ever seen. Spikey pulls out all the gold he's pilfered over the last few days and tells her he's on his way to buy a wedding ring. Right the hell now.

Of course, Groosome and Spikey don't derail the campaign with their newfound faith and love; they're just adding spice to the stew. Groosome goes out on the adventure without a single weapon in his hands, hoping to win over the kobolds, giants and ogres with the Good Word. After all, if it was enough to convert him, it should be enough to convert them, too. And Spikey's still going down in that dungeon, he's just gotta make sure all the gold and silver he gets go toward that ring. And wouldn't his new bride like those tapestries? And those boots? And those chests. . .

A Terminal End

It's a bit short this month, but I've been busy. I had to get *Orkworld* to the printer, pack up my house, get galley copies of *Orkworld* for Origins, pack for Origins, fly to Origins, fly back from Origins, supervise movers, pack up road trip stuff, drive from San Bernardino (LA) to Petaluma (San Francisco) and get ready for a New Job with Totally Games. Very busy this month, but I've got one last Player Trick for you before I go.

Tell your GM how you want your character to die.

Be very specific.

Then, when the opportunity arises, snatch it and hold on with both hands. Wrap your legs around it, sink your teeth in and don't let go.

Go with a bang and a smile.

Take care, and I'll see you all in thirty.

Pyramid Review

Major League Baseball Showdown 2000

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

2 40-card Starters for $9.99, 60 card Draft Packs for $8.99, 9 card boosters for $3.25

Because of the popularity of sports cards, the making of a sports related CCG has seemed inevitable since *Magic* first became a success. But such a combination has never been done successfully, until now. *Major League Baseball Showdown 2000* from Wizards of the Coast has the potential to change all that.

There are a number of reasons for this. The marketing power of Wizards will have an impact, of course. But that wouldn't matter if the product wasn't any good. The rules are simple and playable and the cards are well designed. When you open your first starter, you should find an AL and a NL deck each containing a starting pitcher, a complete batting lineup with a DH, one reliever and a bench player. The starting pitchers are fixed, Greg Maddux and David Cone; neither is the best in his league, but it does guarantee at least one good starter for each league. The rest of the players are an assortment from each league. The core mechanic is quite simple. When each player comes to bat, one 20 sided die is rolled twice, once for the pitch and again for the swing. The pitch determines whether the batter or pitcher has the advantage by comparing the result of the die roll plus the pitcher's Control to the hitters On Base number. The results of the at bat are obtained by looking at the swing chart printed on either the pitcher's or hitter's card, depending on who has the advantage, and the hitter is either out or placed on the appropriate base and other baserunners advance. That's all there is to the most basic game, the Startup rules.

If the game wasn't any more than that, most baseball fans wouldn't be too pleased. But the advanced rules add a number of things to the mix. Most important is the construction of a full team. Unlike real baseball, *MLB Showdown* has a salary cap, which keeps you from being bludgeoned into the ground by your local version of the Yankees, the infamous Mr. Suitcase. Each player has a point value printed on the card; your entire 20 player roster must come in under 5000 points. You need four starting pitchers, so you'll need a few boosters or a draft pack or two to add to that starter pack. And you'll probably want them anyhow to get more strategy cards. These cards are one of the most important factors when building a team. You'll need a 40 card play deck, since there are only 40 strategy cards in a starter you'll need some extras. The strategy cards can be used to shore up a weakness in your team or to add to your dominance in one area. Many of them modify either the pitch or swing die rolls, others allow baserunners to steal or run for extra bases, while others increase the chances of a double play or throwing out a runner. Just Over the Wall gives your outfield a chance, if a slight one, to rob a hitter of a home run. Swing at Anything can be played by either player to reroll a walk result.

Another major addition to the Advanced rules is pitcher fatigue. All pitchers have an IP rating. Once they have pitched that many innings, their control goes down by one each additional inning. Several strategy cards affect this, increasing IP when a pitcher is doing well, decreasing it when he gets shelled. Most starters have an IP of 6 or 7, most relievers have only a 1. And in a series of games, you must not only rotate your starting pitchers, but relievers can't work every day either.

As much as the advanced rules add, most serious baseball fans will prefer the expert rules once they find out that even the fastest player can't score from third on a fly ball under the advanced rules. The expert rules add surprisingly little to the game, more realistic baserunning is the main attraction, and not difficult with the handy reference card and a little baseball knowledge.

When games like *Magic* have rules for league play, it's inevitable that **MLB Showdown** will have them too. There are two basic types of league, constructed and draft. The first type is simple -- build teams normally and play. The second is more akin to a fantasy league; each player brings a number of packs and all players draft their teams from the available pool of cards. Because of the lack of variation in starters and the number of boosters needed to get enough strategy cards, Wizards also releases draft packs with 15 players and 45 strategy cards. These are a good buy even if you're not playing in a league just to get the extra strategy cards.

Although there's a lot to like about this game, there are a few things that aren't so good. The biggest flaw is distribution and cost. A 9 card booster will set you back $3.25 and contains only two strategy cards, making it very difficult to get a good assortment without buying entire boxes. Even worse, the premium player foil cards are found in one third of the packs; in the first shipment, they come in exactly every third pack. If you have any interest in getting foils (and many fan favorites aren't available any other way), be sure to buy entire boxes, open the box yourself or only buy from someone you absolutely trust, otherwise, the foil packs may have already been picked out.

Other problems are minor and in some cases a direct result of the format of the game. Not being able to steal without the right strategy card in hand will frustrate some people, while the automatic success of sacrifice bunts will annoy others. Some of the player stats seem questionable at best; Mark Grace has a fielding of zero at first base, a barely average rating for one of the best fielders at the position. Others will be the source of some argument, although that is part of the fun of sports games.

Overall, this is a fine attempt at turning baseball into a card game. Perhaps the best compliment that can be paid **MLB Showdown** is that, when listening to real games, I find myself thinking about what strategy cards were played to produce the results.

-- Leon Stauffer

Murphy's Rules

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

?

Magic Comet Ride

"In ancient times, comets were regarded as auguries of disasters, such as famine, plague, or wars. In modern times, they have figured in speculations about the history of the earth."
-- Leslie A. Shepard, *The Encyclopedia of Occultism & Parapsychology*

We're going back to May, the merry month of May, and specifically May 19, 1910, when the Earth was forever altered by the tail of Halley's Comet. Except that it wasn't. But having seen four ways it could have been in our earlier orbit, we'll come around for another pass and try again. This time, the Comet awakens not plagues or superpowers but forces potentially more deadly and more powerful than either: the forces (and races) of magic. So let's look at this **GURPS Technomancer-Steampunk-Cliffhangers** crossover, this **Shadowrun: 1910** in the arcing light of the Comet's passing.

"And as a flaming sword is it dropt through the abyss, where the four beasts keep watch and ward. And it appeareth in the heaven of Jupiter as a morning star, or as an evening star. And the light thereof shineth even unto the earth, and bringeth hope and help to them that dwell in the darkness of thought, and drink of the poison of life. Fifty are the gates of understanding, and one hundred and six are the seasons thereof. And the name of every season is Death."
-- Aleister Crowley, *Liber 418* (Dec. 3, 1909)

When the Comet's tail washed over the Earth, it left trails and threads of "angel hair" falling slowly through the sky. For three days, the stuff fell, winding up webbed through forests, matted in the oceans, strung across mountainsides, and draped over city rooftops. Scientists found that it gave wildly variant results to identical tests; spiritualists found that it, like "ectoplasm," responded to psychic commands. Aleister Crowley found that if you inhaled the smoke of its burning, you saw Things. Soon, everyone found that it somehow transmitted (or fixed, or created) magical energy even as it sublimed into the ground and water; the anthropologist J.G. Frazer famously quipped that it was "mana from heaven." Over the long, hot summer of 1910, there were more reports of poltergeists, strange lights in the skies, accidental summonings of the dead by mediums, and generally inexplicable phenomena than all the previous records combined. The astronomer Sir Joseph Lockyer noted that many of these occurrences happened on sites associated with primitive magic or rituals, and that some of those sites could be linked by straight lines, or "isothaums." Slowly the Royal Society (aided, perhaps, by the Quatuor Coronati Lodge of Masonic researchers) and the Society for Psychical Research began to puzzle out the new rules of magic. And then, on Halloween, 1910, the rules changed again.

"But if a godness places kindly lights in the sky, also it is spreading upon the minds of this earth a darkness of scientists."
-- Charles Fort, *Lo!*

Every would-be cult of black magicians had chosen that Halloween to test out those demonic summonings that had never worked before; the Q.C.L. and S.P.R. had arranged a test of Frazerian thaumo-mechanics at Stonehenge; the last remnants of the Sioux resolved to try the Ghost Dance again. And the air ripped open, and the Elves walked out of trees in Europe, and Russia, and North America. And the earth coughed, and Orcs boiled from the Brocken and out of the Carpathians. And the mountains groaned, and the Dwarves set up shop in the Rockies and the Alps and the Andes. Trolls rose from the water under bridges (and it took the *U.S.S. Kearsarge* two hours to shell the one that showed up under the Brooklyn Bridge into submission); Giants appeared on mountain glaciers from Norway to Oregon to Tibet; Merfolk dove away from passing ships (and looted smaller craft). Demons appeared in magic circles, slew their unfortunate summoners and flew into the night; vampires howled, and dragon reports came from the few aviators aloft. All the races of the Otherworld had returned to ours.

The Great Powers reacted as best they could. King George V granted the Elf-lords noble titles, Henry Ford paid the heads of the American Dwarf-clans handsomely to set up production facilities in Denver, General von Moltke quivered with delight as he realized that the only thing Orcs were better suited for than hard factory work was military drill. Other transitions came less easily. American Elves despised the Human democracy they found themselves under the guns of, and with allies from the Georgia KKK to the Colorado Paiute the more hot-tempered of them launched guerrilla raids against their "inferiors." Socialist agitators and Dwarves with strict medieval guild-rules battled each other, and the company police, in the Ruhr and the Midlands. Colonial governors suddenly found their authority

receding back to the iron railways and the Maxim guns as a thousand minor spirits and jungle bogies fueled uprisings, wars, or murderous rampages leaving colonies in chaos. Each government quickly discovered the special frustrations of depending on cranky dog-scholar occultists for magical information and interpretation. Perhaps with the confusion of the times, it was inevitable that something trigger a war; ironically, it was a Human with a pistol in Sarajevo.

Rapidly, the Great Powers made their peace with the reasonable Others, and ruthlessly exterminated the unreasonable, or drove them into hiding. War brought a certain clarity, and threw aristocratic Elves and proletarian Humans together in the trenches. The more generally warlike attitude of the Others became an advantage to the Human governments, with the Orcs' ferocity (and incredibly rapid breeding potential) becoming the greatest advantage of all, though restricted to the Central Powers by an accident of magical geography. General Staffs flung vast resources into magical research; a new professional class of magician began replacing the drug-addled Theosophists and mountebanks of the pre-war years. Mesmerized dragons swept the skies clear of zeppelins, and then burned cities in daylight raids. By the time Rasputin's coup had taken Russia out of the war (fugitive Elves hinted at a Demonic Empire), "Lawrence of the Djinn" took down the Turks. In the West, the Americans in their Dwarven fighting vehicles finally broke through the savage Orcish resistance and Germany signed the Armistice of 1919.

"Its sources are things long before in mind, or in some cases already written, and little or nothing in it was modified by the war that began in 1939 or its sequels. The real war does not resemble the legendary war in its process or in its conclusion. If it had inspired or directed the development of the legend, then certainly the Ring would have been siezed and used against Sauron . . ."
-- J.R.R. Tolkien, "Foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*"

The exhausted victors found themselves with entirely new problems. The influenza of 1918-1920 brought a plague of Ghouls to most of the world's capitals. Colonial unrest became colonial uprisings from the Naga Rebellion in India to the Leopard Man bush war in Sierra Leone to the Biloko campaign that simply swallowed up the Congo while Belgium bled in Europe. In Russia, the "Demon-priest" Rasputin turned his red-rimmed gaze on his rivals, purging them repeatedly. The Japanese brought their Oni and Kappa under control, but only at the cost of a military coup which brought expansionist generals and admirals into power; they now gobble up piece after piece of a China fallen into Triad-riven chaos. Lawrence's Arab Republic went from British puppet to British rival, between its designs on Egypt (suddenly the most valuable magical real estate on Earth) and its opposition to the Jewish settlers (and their golems) in British Palestine. Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay, and Peru began fighting their own wars over Inca power sites and nitrate deposits; their Dwarven craftsmen (stolidly chewing coca leaves) entered a spiraling race to build ever-more bizarre mountain warcraft.

The savage losses to both Elves and Humans in England and France upset the Seelie Court and European aristocratic society. The two races began to interbreed, much to the dismay of elders on both sides. New magical techniques competed with Dwarven craftsmanship to drive Human workers out of their jobs; the result was more union and Socialist action, eventually leading to national strikes. Vampirism briefly became fashionable after Valentino's undeath in 1924, spreading a new wave of debauchery through "bathtub blood" parties. The younger (or less restrained) Others rapidly integrated themselves into criminal rings and fringe political movements. One such, the Nazgûl-Socialist Party, actually siezed power in Germany in the 1923 Putsch, thanks to massive support from Orcish war veterans who demanded some respect from their defeated nation. Finally, the whole system just gave out in 1929, plunging the globe into a fierce depression that's already three years old and shows no signs of abating. What the next decade will bring, only the augurs and diviners can say -- and they look pale, and swallow hard, and speak in whispers thereafter.

In this world, the PCs might be sorcerous-archaeological teams trying to capture magical artifacts for study ahead of the Nazis or the Japanese for a ***GURPS Cliffhangers*** feel. A party of freelance monster-hunters delving into abandoned European trench-and-tunnel networks buzzing with unexpended magical ordnance and unclassified magical vermin could be close to conventional ***Dungeons & Dragons*** or to unconventional fantastic ***GURPS Horror***. PCs could also be corporate operatives trying to steal a new Dwarven prototype, or labor agitators in a hit-and-run battle of urban punk survival, or Army fliers on dragon patrol, or mercenaries fighting snake-men (or arrogant Elvish sahibs) in India, or British Q.C.L. magi fighting a war of wits against Rasputin's Okhrana. The future casts a long shadow, but you can beat it -- if you run.

Dork Tower!

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Miscellanea I

Okay; my life is sorting out a bit. . . but to be honest it's mostly the eye of the storm. The end of July/beginning of August will be very hectic for me. I point this out because, for the first time in a month and a half, my weekend days (which I normally use to get ahead of the game on *Pyramid*) will be available to me. This means correspondence will hopefully get answered, the Slushpile will get read (or at least whittled down), and I'll be able to get a bit ahead on Random Thought Tables. And then at the end of July I get to go out of town *again* (ugh) and move a week later.

Thanks for bearing with me, and thanks for the words of encouragement. They mean a lot.

* * *

Special Announcement

John Kovalic has an insane convention schedule for the next two weeks, and as such is taking a two-week break from Dork Tower. But not wanting to deprive his devoted following of Kovalician goodness, he has arranged for a special preview of his new project *Snap Dragons*. For this week and next, you'll get three strips for the price of one! These strips will appear in *Dork Tower* #9, but only in black & white. . . because *we* don't charge more for the color pixels.

* * *

For folks writing reviews, here's a few pointers.

- Make sure you include the "vital stats" of the product you're reviewing. This includes the writers/creators of the game, the publisher of the game, the cost, and how many pages it has or components it comes with.
- Don't feel obliged to give a page-by-page breakdown of the supplement. You certainly can, but an itemized list of what's in each chapter may not be as useful as a more generalized view.
- If you like a product, try to think and say exactly *why*. Is it informative? Useful? Fun to read? Saying "I liked ***Advanced Character Compendium 12: Clan Webmonkey***" isn't as helpful to the would-be review reader as "***Advanced Character Compendium 12: Clan Webmonkey*** is the first book that enabled me to understand the unique worldview of the Webmonkeys in the ***Dude: The Slacking RPG***, thanks to its strongly written first person format."
- If you don't like a product, try to say exactly *why*. Is the text flat? Are there glaring mistakes? Is there too little information? Is the book too expensive for what you're getting?
- If you *don't* like a product, try to put yourself in the mindset of someone who might. If you *do* like a product, try to figure out what other people might dislike about it. In my mind, a good reviewer will be able to say not just whether or not they like a product, but who *would* like a product. "People who buy ***ACC12CW*** hoping to improve their character with new equipment and powers will be greatly disappointed. But if you're looking to understand Webmonkey society, their structure and the subplots that make up their culture, ***ACC12CW*** should be a rewarding book."
- For board and card game reviewers, make sure you don't bog your review with too much detail about the rules. You don't need to detail the draw phase, the resource allocation phase, the recounting chits in piles phase, and so on. If a game has a unique play mechanic or device that you want to talk about, then by all means talk about it. But you may want to avoid bogging down your review with a mind-numbing recap of the rulebook; much more useful is an overview of how fun the game is, how social it is, how much luck or skill comes into play, etc.
- Don't forget that you can talk about the physical aspect of the product itself, especially if it influences your perceptions of the game. Art quality and quantity, font and word density, and other non-content related factors can influence the experience of a game. As an ex-retailer, I was able to sell a lot of ***Changeling 2nd Edition*** because it was such a beautiful book. That would be information I would have included with a review of that book.

* * *

Dave Thomas doesn't *really* flip burgers.

For those of you not in the states, Dave Thomas is the Head Honcho of the Wendy's hamburger franchise (the Wendy in question is also his daughter). For whatever reason, Wendy's has chosen him rather than H.R. Puffenstuffy constructs to plug their burgers. As a result there are lots of commercials where you'll see Dave Thomas wearing the little hat and flipping burgers, serving customers behind the counter.

He really doesn't do that. (I don't think so, at any rate. . .)

What does this have to do with anything? Well, there's a sort of fantasy involved when thinking about most creative endeavors where you just sort of believe that everyone is sitting around a huge funhouse, creating products of mirth and merriment.

Unfortunately, the fantasy is usually a lie (or at least an exaggeration).

- Stan Lee doesn't write all those comics.
- Grandma doesn't bake all those Homestyle cookies for Frito Lay.
- E. & J. Gallo, largest wine maker in the world, does not hire two guys named Bartles & James to make their wine coolers.
- And I don't have much to do with Steve Jackson Games outside of *Pyramid*.

I point this out because I'm usually (but not always) the one who comes up with the Pyramid Poll, and I generally do this without instruction or guidance from The Powers That Be at Steve Jackson Games.

I bring it up because, even though I provide my e-mail address on almost every Pyramid Poll as an Other, that doesn't mean that 1) I have anything to do with the matter of the question, and 2) I have any power to change it, unless it relates to Pyramid.

So when I get e-mails like, "Why the heck do you have such cruddy binding on the **GURPS Hardback**?" or "Why don't you release out of print books on CD-ROM?", there's not much I can do per se. If the letter is interesting enough I might forward it to whoever I think *should* get it, but generally it gets read, assimilated into the "what's on *Pyramid* readers' minds" file, and moved to the Personal folder.

I don't want folks to think that the Polls don't matter; they do. Even from those not solicited from the Home Office, they are a good resource to look back on. ("Hmm. . . I wonder how people would feel about a hardback release of this product?") And they're great for beginning discussions and alerting me to viewpoints I may not have been aware of.

But I don't want anyone to think that I'm running down the hall, pounding on Steve's door to demand that **Kung Fu 2100** be brought back into print just because I get an e-mail about it.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

(Last week's answer) **In Nomine**, p. 21.

(Four stars) "Enter the dangerous and sexy world of the undead when vampires clash with mortals and each other in modern-day San Francisco."

The Quality of Mercy

by James Maliszewski

Art by **Christopher Shy**

"Captain's log, stardate 3109.9. We're currently escorting the research vessel, U.S.S. Sayegh, through an uncharted region of the Shana sector. The sector is located near the Romulan Neutral Zone and the recent disappearance of another research vessel in this region, the U.S.S. Pavan, concerns Starfleet. We've been ordered to remain with the Sayegh until it completes its sensor scans of the sector's Chi 160 pulsar.

"These scans should take no more than a couple days. Once completed, we're to return to Starbase 110 with the Sayegh and the data from Chi 160. This should be an uneventful -- even boring -- mission. I anticipate nothing more troublesome than the demands of the Sayegh's overly zealous scientists for assistance in their endeavors."

"The Quality of Mercy" is an episode written for Last Unicorn's ***Star Trek Roleplaying Game***. While set during the time period of the Original Series, the episode could easily be adapted to the ***Star Trek: The Next Generation Roleplaying Game*** with minimal effort. Few, if any, of the characters and concepts within it will require extensive modification by the Narrator. The primary requirement for the success of the episode is that the Crew serves aboard a ship of the line, such as a Constitution-class vessel, currently assigned to deep space exploration.

Background Information

The Shana sector is a recently discovered region of space within the Federation's exploration zone, but close to the Romulan Neutral Zone. The Federation has not claimed the sector, as it is home to at least two native species with small interstellar states of their own. These two species are the Amena and the Beronin, humanoids with a long history of warring against one another. Both the Amena and the Beronin have warp-capable civilizations (early Level Six technology) with several inhabited worlds. The Amena and Beronin are humanoids, looking very much like humans or Centaurans. The Amena have very pale complexions and light hair, while the Beronin have more swarthy complexions and little to no hair at all.

The Federation has contacted both the Amenar Unity and the Beronin Empire in an effort to open a dialog between them. These efforts have been marginally successful to date. While a lasting peace may take years to negotiate, Federation diplomats are at least pleased to report that most of the on-again, off-again fighting of the past few decades has ceased under their influence.

The Shana sector possesses an unusually large number of Class M worlds. Consequently, Starfleet has dispatched several research vessels to chart them and other stellar phenomena over the past several months. One of them, the U.S.S. Pavan (an Antares-class starship), disappeared without a trace just weeks ago while exploring the sector. Starfleet fears that the Romulans may have had a hand in the Pavan's disappearance, but have nothing to support this fear.

Rather than risk the loss of another ship, Starfleet has dispatched the Crew's ship to escort another science vessel, the U.S.S. Sayegh (also Antares-class under the command of Captain Sameer Sukhamaran), to collect data from the sector's lone pulsar. Unbeknownst to them, events will take a different course, embroiling them in the sector's politics and uncovering the fate of the Pavan.

Act One: Chi 160

This act starts off the episode by presenting the Crew with a dangerous situation that demands quick thinking and a good command of a starship. More importantly, the act introduces an important non-player character that serves as a link to the episode's later events.

Scene One: Sensor Scans

The Sayegh's itinerary requires that it make several passes within a few million kilometers of Chi 160 in order to collect data. This will take about 36 hours to complete. During this time, the Crew is free to do whatever they wish, as their ship need do nothing more than make sure that the Sayegh does not suffer the same fate as the Pavan.

In order to avoid the deleterious effects of the pulsar's radiation, both the Crew's ship and the Sayegh must modulate their shields on a specific frequency. This requires a Challenging Systems Engineering (Shields) test to be successful. Should the Crew's engineer fail in this test, their shields will not be properly reconfigured and will be affected by the pulsar's radiation. The Narrator should not begin to apply the effects of this failure until their ship has spent some time in the proximity of the pulsar.

Scene Two: Trouble!

This scene can occur in two ways. The simplest way is when the Crew's ship has reconfigured its shields successfully, but the Sayegh has not. In this case, the Crew is in a better situation to assist the Sayegh and save that ship. The more complicated way is when the Crew's ship is also affected. In the latter case, the Crew can still act, but they face formidable obstacles.

In either case, the pulsar's radiation takes effect only 2 hours after entering its area. It causes the ship's computer and other systems to shut down completely by damaging the power conduits that provide them with energy. Narrators should determine for themselves which systems are affected and how badly. The important thing to remember is that any damage should serve a dramatic purpose and show that the pulsar is dangerous. The Sayegh will suffer a loss of both its navigation and helm systems, along with intermittent life support outages. This will cause the science vessel to careen helplessly toward the pulsar.

Repairing the damage done requires several Challenging Systems Engineering and Propulsion Engineering tests to be successful. Similarly, the Crew will need to find a way to make certain that their shields are again functioning properly. In any case, the Narrator should be prepared to deal with a variety of possible solution, as Starfleet personnel are very clever and Federation technology quite impressive. Common sense should rule the day, however.

Saving the Sayegh is also open to many solutions. The simplest is to beam members of the Crew over to assist in the repairs. More complicated solutions are possible as well.

Scene Three: Issa to the Rescue

At some point in their struggles with the pulsar, the Crew are hailed by Dolbec of the Amena rescue ship Issa. Dolbec explains he is on patrol in search of damaged vessels and asks if he can be of assistance. When he learns that the Crew are Starfleet personnel, he is obviously overjoyed. He renders whatever aid he can, even going so far as to offer repair crews. Unfortunately, Amena technology is not quite up to Federation standards and they prove of little help. However, he does suggest a proven frequency at which to modulate shields against the pulsar's radiation. If the Crew has not already found a solution already, Dolbec's will serve them well.

Dolbec asks the Crew to return with him to Amena space. He explains that he runs a refugee camp for the forgotten victims of the war with the Beronin. The refugees are in much need of medical attention, some of it from horrible weapons. Dolbec knows that the Federation's medical technology is advanced and pleads for them to assist these poor souls.

The Sayegh is now too damaged to continue its survey of Chi 160. Captain Sukhamaran asks for an escort back to the edge of Federation space to set in for repairs. The Crew need not go all the way back to starbase with him, especially if they acquiesce to Dolbec's plea. Captain Sukhamaran promises to contact them when they dock to let them know the Sayegh returned intact.

Act Two: Things are Not What They Seem

Having escaped the pulsar, the Crew's ship heads into Amena space at the suggestion of Dolbec. Dolbec asks that they pay a visit to the planet Aparna to provide medical assistance to the refugees there. Although Amena medical science is highly sophisticated, Dolbec explains that the Unity government has provided far from enough supplies to meet his needs. Furthermore, visiting Aparna would give the Crew an opportunity to examine the damaged shuttlecraft the Issa discovered.

The Quality of Mercy

Scene One: Medical Emergency

The planet Aparna is a sparsely populated Class M world at the edge of Amena space. Aparna's surface is barren and desolate, the result of decades of fighting against the Beronin with biological and chemical weapons. Dolbec explains that the Unity evacuated most of Aparna's population to other worlds. Those that remained took shelter beneath the planet's surface in a series of underground caverns. These caverns are currently home to thousands of refugees and the Amena who tend to their needs. Dolbec admits this isn't an ideal locale for his efforts, but it's the best he could arrange with the Unity government.

The Narrator should use this scene to emphasize the large numbers of refugees and their plight. The refugees, including children, suffer from a variety of ailments -- malnutrition, disease, and the effects of biochemical agents. Nearly all of these ailments can be easily cured with supplies from the Crew's ship. Unfortunately, doing so will take a great deal of time, as there are literally thousands of refugees. Even if the ship's entire medical staff beams down to the planet and works around the clock, it will take several weeks to treat everyone adequately. Similarly, the Narrator should make clear the unwillingness of the Unity government to provide more than token assistance to Dolbec and his cause.

The Crew may well decide to call Starfleet for additional assistance. This is a reasonable course of action. Unfortunately, Starfleet has few starships to spare at the moment. Assistance will not be forthcoming for a week at the earliest. This leaves the Crew to its resources. This dilemma provides an opportunity for the Crew to use their ship's resources as best as they are able. Narrators should reward ingenious solutions and original thinking with beneficial results. Of course, even the most clever of plans will not cure all the refugees overnight, but could go a long way toward easing the refugees' suffering.

Although humanoid, the internal physiology of the Amena is quite different from that of humans. Consequently, the Chief Medical Officer will need to take genetic samples from the refugees in order to treat them properly. This is particularly important because of the nature of the biochemical agents used on many of them. The Narrator should emphasize that no cure of the refugees will be 100% effective without an extensive genetic scan that will take several days to complete. In the meantime, medical teams can ameliorate some of the worst injuries until the scans are

finished.

Scene Two: The Shuttlecraft

Dolbec gladly shows the Crew the damaged shuttlecraft. He has had it placed in an underground hangar along with several Amena orbital vessels. The shuttlecraft is seriously damaged -- ripped in half by some form of energy weapon attack. Naturally, no one survived the attack and Dolbec reports finding no bodies within the wreckage to identify. A visual examination of it reveals that it is indeed one of the Pavan's shuttles. Its hull numbers and configuration match those of the missing science vessel.

A Moderate test of Shipboard Systems (Weapons) will reveal that a disruptor most likely caused the damage on the shuttle's hull. Many species, including the Klingons and Romulans, use disruptor weapons, so any definite attribution is extremely hard on such minimal evidence. Both the Amena and the Beronin use disruptors as well, but do not offer this information unless the Crew asks for it.

A Routine test of Personal Equipment (Tricorder or Medical Tricorder) will reveal only that Centaurans -- who made up the bulk of the Pavan's crew -- had occupied the shuttlecraft before its destruction. All of the craft's computer and guidance systems have been damaged beyond recovery. Should the Crew think of it, the wreckage can be transported to their ship for further analysis. However, no new information will be revealed through these efforts.

If asked, Dolbec provides the Crew with the coordinates of where he found the shuttlecraft. These coordinates are deep in uncharted space, but quite some distance from the Neutral Zone. Dolbec explains that the Issa's sensors have been modified to operate at extremely long ranges. He and his crew use them to search for damaged Amena vessels that have somehow lost their way home. Interestingly, the coordinates are some distance from the Pavan's last reported position. It's not inconceivable that an Antares-class ship could get as far as the coordinates; it's simply odd given where Starfleet believed it to have been.

Dolbec will express sincere regret at the loss of life aboard the shuttlecraft. He will then go on to explain that he was once a soldier in the wars between the Amenar Unity and the Beronin Empire. Like many young men, he thought it was his duty to serve the Unity in this way. In time, he realized that war would solve nothing and he renounced his former life. He then devoted himself to aiding those afflicted by this war wherever he found them. Dolbec regrets that he cannot do more, but he hopes that the Federation may eliminate the need for his activities. In fact, Dolbec looks forward to the day when there are no more refugees to aid.

Characters who succeed at a Routine Medical Science (Psychology) test will be convinced of the depth of Dolbec's pacifism and dedication to aiding others. A Moderate test of the same skill will reveal that, despite this, Dolbec is hiding something. What he is saying is not entirely the truth. Attempts to use any form of Telepathy or Empathy on him will fail -- the Amena brain is too different to be affected by most psionics.

Scene Three: Into the Void

Traveling to the coordinates Dolbec provided will take the characters about five parsecs beyond the Amena frontier. Routine sensor scans will reveal the area to be devoid of any stellar bodies or asteroids. In fact, the area is completely devoid of anything at all! It is simply deep, open space.

More detailed scans will not even reveal a single additional fragment of the Pavan's shuttlecraft. This is extremely odd, especially considering the fact that disruptors destroyed the craft. Unlike phasers, disruptors generally leave debris behind, even if it is only on the molecular level. The ship's sensors reveal no debris of any sort. Even taking into account several days of drift, the coordinates cannot be correct. The most logical conclusion is that Commander Dolbec has deceived the Crew.

While the Crew is searching the area, long-range sensors detect the presence of another ship several light-years behind them. A Moderate Shipboard Systems (Sensors) test will reveal that the ship is, in fact, a Beronin warship and is headed in the same general direction as the Crew's ship. It does not appear to be following the Starfleet vessel, but a

Routine Shipboard Systems (Helm) or Starship Tactics (Any) test will show that it is employing a search pattern.

Scene Four: Another Perspective

Unless the Crew seeks it out, the Beronin vessel will make no effort to contact them. It appears to be going about its own business. Should the Crew hail them, however, they will respond. The ship's commander, Captain Suma of the starship Talman, will communicate only reluctantly and is marked by a gruff manner. He explains that the Talman is patrolling Beronin territory in search of a renegade Amena vessel that is threatening the cease-fire brokered by the Federation. The Amena starship shows no respect for recognized borders and has even been detected in orbit around several worlds on the Amena-Beronin frontier.

If confronted with the fact that the Talman is no longer within Beronin territory, Captain Suma will become agitated. He'll rudely explain that the Beronin Empire does not take kindly to interlopers and will pursue such beings wherever they go -- except into Amena territory, of course. Suma claims that he had reports that this renegade Amena vessel had been detected in this area of space. He then asks the Crew to leave the area, so that he may continue his own mission.

Suma is ill-mannered and clearly resents the presence of Starfleet in the Shana sector. In general, he is uncooperative and surly, providing only as little information as is required. If asked about the renegade Amena vessel, he will transmit several sensor logs to the Crew's ship. An analysis reveals that Suma is telling the truth -- an Amena vessel has been spotted in Beronin territory, even in orbit around several Beronin worlds. More startlingly, the Amena ship appears to be the Issa!

Although resentful toward the Crew, Captain Suma asks them if they have encountered this vessel in their travels. In turn, he denies ever having encountered the Pavan. He suggests that perhaps the renegade Amena ship is to blame. After all, the Amena are an untrustworthy people and there would still be war were it not for the "good works" of the Federation. With that note of sarcasm, the Talman turns around and heads back toward Beronin space.

Scene Five: Medical Discovery

The Chief Medical Officer and his staff will discover several unusual findings from their genetic scans of the Amena refugees. First, not all of the refugees are Amena -- a few dozen are actually Beronin! Although the two species generally look different from one another, there is considerable ethnic variation within each group. Thus, it's quite possible for one to pass for the other.

Second, the genetic variation between the Amena and the Beronin is slight. Distinguishing between them is not difficult with the proper medical equipment. Even so, the variation is small, so small that most Federation anthropologists wouldn't consider the Amena and Beronin to be separate species at all.

Third, the DNA of both the Amena and the Beronin possesses an additional protein sequence that appears artificial. The sequence serves no obvious purpose and has the hallmarks of being engineered. Without further evidence, it's hard to say, but it's possible that both the Amena and Beronin are the descendants of a genetic experiment of some sort. By whom, no one can guess at this point.

Finally, the genetic scans have provided the CMO with enough data to alleviate the ailments of the refugees, whether Amena or Beronin. Several days will still be needed to fabricate the necessary drugs, however.

Scene Six: Back to Aparna

More than likely, the Crew will want to return to Aparna to confront Dolbec about the Issa's recent travels. If what Captain Suma said is true -- and the sensor logs support him in this -- Dolbec has been lying to them. Rightfully, they'll want to find out why.

By the time they arrive at Aparna, however, Dolbec and the Issa are nowhere to be found. Inquiries at the refugee camps will reveal that the Issa disembarked on another mission just a few hours ago. While it has a head start, the

Issa's maximum speed is warp 6 and it is unlikely to traveling at that velocity. Thus, it shouldn't be hard to catch up to the Issa -- if the Crew can determine where it is!

Act Three: Resolution

The events of this episode finally come to a head as the Crew unravels its central mystery: what happened to the Pavan and what role did the supposedly pacifistic Dolbec play in its disappearance? The Narrator should take care to play up the tension of this act. The Crew has been deceived by someone they thought trustworthy. They'll naturally want to know the reasons behind this deception. The revelation of that reason will present them with a moral quandary they might not have expected.

Scene One: Parth

No one on Aparna knows the Issa's destination. However, a Moderate Shipboard Systems (Sensors) test will reveal its current location. The ship is now within the borders of the Beronin Empire in orbit around the planet Parth. Parth is a Class M world whose location is very close to the Amena-Beronin border. Parth was a major battleground in the wars and saw heavy casualties. For the most part, the Beronin have abandoned it, although there is still a small population on its blasted surface.

Reaching Parth will require the Crew to cross the Beronin border, an act the Empire might consider provocative. Nevertheless, there is no way to reach the Issa or Parth without crossing the frontier. The Crew must decide for themselves whether or not to do so. Their feelings might well be affected by the knowledge that their ship's sensors also detect a Beronin warship en route to Parth at maximum warp. Clearly, the Beronin have decided to deal with this intruder by force.

The Beronin warship will reach Parth in fifteen minutes. This doesn't give the Crew much time to act. The Narrator should keep reasonable track of game time, making certain to keep the Crew under pressure. There's no need to rush things, but the Crew should never forget that they are under a time constraint.

At this stage, the Crew can do one of several obvious things. First, they could hail the Issa in an attempt to determine what it is doing. Second, they can use their sensors to determine what they can about its activities. Third, they can beam down to Parth (or the Issa, for that matter) and see for themselves. Other options are available, of course, and the Narrator should be prepared to deal with them as the need arises.

If the Crew hails the Issa, Dolbec will answer them. He'll be evasive and will answer few direct questions. He will, however, warn the Crew to leave Beronin space or they'll suffer the same fate as the Pavan. If told of the approaching Beronin warship, he'll thank the Crew and promise to be out of the area before it arrives. Other than this, he'll say nothing more.

Scanning the Issa will reveal that its shields are not operative at the present time. Its transporters are operating at very high levels, beaming large numbers of people from the surface of Parth to the Issa's large cargo areas. The scans cannot determine whether the persons beamed aboard are Amena or Beronin.

Beaming down to the planet's surface will reveal a refugee camp very similar to that on Aparna, although less well maintained. Like its counterpart, the camp is filled to overflowing with the wounded and the dying, many of them afflicted with biochemical ailments. Several members of the Issa's crew appear to assisting their Beronin counterparts in transporting some of the worst cases aboard their starship. If confronted, the Issa's crew will admit that they are aiding their former enemies against the wishes of both governments. If the Crew really cares about a lasting peace, they should either help them or at least not delay them. Time is of the essence.

The same basic course of events will occur if the Crew beam over to the Issa unannounced. In this case, Dolbec himself explains all of the above information to the Crew. He apologizes profusely for the deception, but feared the Crew would reveal his covert activities, thereby jeopardizing both himself and his Beronin counterparts. He explains

that neither the Unity nor the Empire is willing to expend the little effort necessary to aid those most harmed by the wars. Instead, they'd rather seek redress for long-forgotten slights and curry favor with the Federation against the other. When he learned that Beronin refugees were in even worse straits than the Amena, Dolbec felt there was no option but to cross the border illegally and assist them as best he could. Since then, he has been secretly ferrying small numbers of Beronin to Aparna for medical treatment.

In addition, Dolbec reveals that he misled the Crew about the location where he found the Pavan's shuttlecraft for a similar reason -- he found it in Beronin space! As the Crew may already suspect by now, disruptor weapons from either a Beronin or Amena starship destroyed the shuttle. In point of fact, Dolbec knows that it was a Beronin vessel that mistakenly believed the Pavan to be the Issa. If asked, he can provide data to show that the disruptor damage to the shuttle is consistent with Beronin weapons technology, not the Amena (or the Romulans or Klingons, for that matter). Dolbec lied to protect both himself and the Beronin. He fears that, if the Federation found out that the Beronin were responsible for the destruction of one of its ships, it might lead to war -- something Dolbec wishes to avoid at all costs.

Scene Two: Showdown

As the Crew and the Issa's rescue team confer, the Beronin warship arrives in the Parth system. The warship is on an intercept course with the Issa, its weapons and shields ready for combat. Captain Trudel commands the ship, called the Memari. Trudel hails the Issa and asks that they prepare to be boarded. He also asks that the Crew's ship not become involved in what he calls "an internal matter of the Beronin Empire."

Quick thinking is called for at this point. Dolbec refuses to accept a boarding party and prepares to flee back into Amena space. He asks the Crew to assist him in this endeavor. While the Memari is less powerful than a Constitution-class vessel (it's the equivalent of a Ranger-class starship), the Crew should realize that attacking it would create a significant diplomatic incident. The Federation would be none too pleased with their firing upon the Memari. Even assisting the Issa might be suspect behavior. Instead, they must find other options.

Attempting to reason with Captain Trudel is the best option. Like all the Beronin, however, he resents the Federation presence in the Shana sector and quickly digs in his heels. He argues (not unreasonably) that the Issa has violated Beronin space and should be detained. If told that the Issa is on a mission of mercy, he will be skeptical. If shown proof, he will soften somewhat. Whatever the case, he will insist that he alone has jurisdiction in this area. No one -- certainly not the Federation -- will dictate his course of action.

If confronted with evidence that a Beronin warship destroyed a Starfleet vessel, Trudel will back off somewhat. He will maintain the pose that the Beronin answer to no one within their own space. Yet, he is clearly frightened that news of this attack will create a diplomatic incident (as anyone with Medical Science (Psychology) will realize). Thus, he will "allow" the Crew's ship and the Issa to leave Beronin space "in the interests of peace." He will demand that any Beronin citizens aboard the Issa be returned to Parth, but he will do no more than protest if his demand is not met.

Scene Three: Conclusion

Provided Dolbec and the Issa escape, the Crew will want to return to Amena space to assess all that they've learned. In addition, Dolbec will be quite interested to hear that the Amena and the Beronin are close genetic relatives, perhaps even once the same species before centuries of genetic drift separated them. That they're engineered species (if the Crew reveals that too) will only add to his wonderment. Dolbec will see both of these discoveries as useful tools in ending the conflicts of the Shana sector. If the Amena and Beronin can come to see themselves as sibling species rather than rivals, perhaps a lasting peace can be forged.

Of course, the destruction of the Pavan raises some difficult questions. The evidence the Crew has gathered suggests strongly that a Beronin warship destroyed the Starfleet vessel. Whether or not the attack was intentional, it is still a terrible tragedy. The Crew can choose either to report the truth to Starfleet or to hide what they've discovered. Dolbec argues for the latter course of action, believing that no good will come of branding the Beronin as trigger-happy thugs. At the same time, he understands that the Crew has a duty to the truth. The final decision rests with the Crew's captain,

who may be swayed by eloquent arguments for or against either position.

Rewards

All characters that complete this episode should be awarded 2 Experience Points for their efforts. If they dealt with the moral dilemmas it occasioned in an especially exemplary fashion, they are eligible for an additional Experience Point.

All characters that complete this episode receive 2 points of Renown, one in Skill and one in Openness. Those who do not counsel violence when confronted with the Beronin warship receive an additional point of Renown in Openness. Additional awards are possible depending on the circumstances of the episode. Narrators should consult the Reward Awards Table for suggestions.

Sequels

There are many potential follow-ups to this episode. For one, the Crew could be assigned to Shana sector for an extended period of time to deal with aftermath of its many revelations. How does Starfleet deal with the fact that the Beronin destroyed the Pavan? Do they Amena take advantage of this situation? What of the fact that the Amena and Beronin are actually "siblings?" Can this news bring lasting peace or will it turn war into a "family affair?"

For that matter, who created the Amena and Beronin and to what end? Is there evidence of this elsewhere in the sector? Could there be any relation between this and the large number of Class M planets in the sector?

The Romulans weren't involved this time, but are they really uninvolved in a region so close to their space? Could there be Romulan spies lurking in the sector's unknown regions?

All of these ideas and more can be exploited by the Narrator looking to continue the Crew's adventures in the Shana sector.

by Joe G. Kushner

Art by Art Today

Captain Basilio damned his luck again. His Kraek, the Magister, had never suffered so much bad luck in its whole existence as it had on this voyage. Bad enough when ten of his crew were slain in a firefight with the cursed French ship Extant, but this new ship was different.

The dead manned it.

Captain Basilio made the sign of the cross and prayed that he would not die on these sorcerers' seas.

While the Golden Age of Piracy does not arrive until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, pirates still thrive in the Renaissance, and can make a useful campaign addition for *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*. The different styles of ships that Mages use, such as Skyriggers, insurers that there are unique types of pirates.

Pirates originate for many reasons. Pirates are lured to the sound of coins clinking together, and gather in hordes to overwhelm their opponents. Many maritime powers employ naval forces only when necessary. The life of a pirate enables these jobless seamen to return to what they know, and if motivated by vengeance, take it. Pirates enjoy an unprecedented amount of freedom. The whole world is theirs for the taking! Who else has the ability to sail around the world and not be at the beck and call of their home government? Lastly, pirates are not above forcing those they've bested to serve them. This insures that pirates always have a new supply of fresh blood.

The perils of piracy are high, however. The punishment for piracy is an old one -- hanging -- and is handed down from the dark ages. In the more enlightened east, beheading is the standard punishment. Privateers, those that worked under a Letter of Marque, can often be ransomed back to their country. The Letter didn't guarantee safety, though. Some countries, like Spain, considered privateers nothing more than poorly organized rabble and denied them any opportunity for ransom. Even if those who have captured the privateer tried to ransom him, if the privateer's country refuses to acknowledge him, the fate of the privateer is the same. Death.

During the Renaissance, most pirates hailed from the Barbary Coast, named after its inhabitants the Berbers. The Berbers founded Algeirs around 950 AD. Muslims fled here after their defeat at the hands of Christians in Spain in 1492 AD.

The Barbary Coast extends from the western board of Egypt to the Atlantic Ocean. Algiers, Tripoli, and Tunis, located in North Africa, serve as the home ports for many of the pirates of this time. These independent Muslim states had alliances to the Ottoman Empire. The

Great Corsairs Barbarossas (a European name originating from their red beards) helped craft the states of Barbara; their real names are Aruj, and his brother Kheir-ed-din (Khayr ad-Din), whose name means "defender of the faith."

Aruj struck a deal with the king of Tunis, the capital port city of Tunisia. In exchange for allowing the harbor to be used for pirate matters, the king would be given one fifth of everything that Aruj captured. One of his greatest deeds is the capture of two of the pope's grand galleys off the coast of Elba.

Barbarossa's rise was not without its trials, though. In 1514 he lost an army while trying to capture Bougie from its Spanish owners. Kheir-ed-din took control while his brother recovered. The two's fortunes increased again when they captured Algiers from the Spanish. By 1517, Barbarossa controlled most of what is now Algeria, save for Penon and a few isolated Spanish garrisons. Algiers, held by the Spanish since 1510, declared itself part of the Ottoman Empire in 1518 and ousted the Spanish.

After Aruj's death at the hands of Spanish forces in 1518, Kheir-ed-din, formerly a lieutenant, molded Algiers into a powerful corsair base and strengthened the Ottoman Empire's power over the waves. In the same year, the Ottoman sultan appointed Kheir as his beylerbey, which made him the Sultan's representative in Algeria. Becoming an Ottoman Admiral in 1533, Barbarossa managed to conquer all of Tunisia within a year and turned it into another pirate haven. This Barbarossa also suffered setbacks, though. The Holy Roman Emperor Charles V captured Tunis and Golettain 1535. Barbarossa rose to the occasion and defeats Charles V's fleet at the Battle of Preveza in 1538. He remained one of the great figures at the court in Istanbul, until he died in 1546.

King Ferdinand V captured Tripoli in 1510, and in 1530 gave it to the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem. Despite being outside of the timeline of a normal *Crusade* game, the capture of Tripoli by Turkish Corsairs in 1551 illustrates that pirates do more than simply capture bounty from others' ships. After its capture by the Turkish, Tripoli remains an Ottoman providence until the twentieth century.

The French provide another avenue of piracy.

Jean Ango of Dieppe, born in 1480, inherits his father's import-export business which controls a fleet of 70 ships. During Francis I's reign, Jean provides Giovanni da Verrazano the "Dauphine" in 1524. While Giovanni da Verrazano is more known for his exploration of what would become North Carolina, the Spanish knew him as a pirate.

Prior to that one of Jean Ango's captains, Jean Fleury, seized three Spanish ships carrying treasures from the Aztec Empire in 1523. Francis authorized Ango to raid Portuguese shipping, which allowed him to compensate for the losses sustained at Portuguese hands. When Francis died, Ango was imprisoned by his rivals in 1549 and dies two years latter.

During the whole period of *M:tSC*, France is almost always at war with Spain. This lends the French and the Spanish many reasons to attack one another on the high seas, even in times of peace. Such details add depth if one character is Spanish and another is French. Would their ties to their Traditions hold them at peace or would nationalistic pride force them to bear arms against one another?

Outside of pirates working directly for a country, the seas were home to organizations whose military strength equaled that of a country. The Hanseatic League, while not a military organization, was able to gather enough force to fend off pirates and when necessary, even to defeat a country. The Ottoman Empire expelled the Knights of Malta, a sect of Knights Hospitalers, from Rhodes in 1522 AD. Charles the V gave these Knights Malta, Gozo, Comino and Tripoli in 1530 AD. The Knights lost Tripoli to Turgut Reis in 1551 AD.

The knights paid one Maltese falcon annually to their overlord and were very self-sufficient. The three limits they labored under included a reliance on Sicily for food, allegiance to the pope, and the power Europeans had over the order when the order labored in those countries. In many cases, the Europeans could claim their possessions without any legal difficulties. These knights were expected to serve Charles in all Christian maritime battles against the Ottomans. One example of this is seen when the knights provided four galleys at Prevesa in 1537 for the struggle against the Barbary corsairs.

Unlike some privateers, the knights were not allowed to keep the goods they claimed and had to surrender them to the order. In 1545, Signorino Gattinaro was punished for attempting to keep his spoils from the order. Still, most of their victims thought of the knights as nothing more than "corsairs parading crosses." Most of these victims were Muslim merchant ships, but Christian and Jewish ships that dared to trade with Muslim ports were also fair game.

Just as the era of the *Sorcerer's Crusade* is fading, the Order suffers numerous setbacks as the Ottomans not only capture Tripoli, but plunder Gozo and attack Malta, all in 1551.

Other knightly orders include the Knights of Rhodes, who are active from 1308 AD to 1522 AD, and the Knights of Saint Stephen, a group of Italian corsairs who thrive from 1562 AD to 1749 AD.

M:tSC Hooks

Game Masters may wish to add the following Concept to those available from *M:tSC* and *M:tSCC*.

- **Pirate**
  The Spanish make it so easy. They do all the hard work of fighting, mining, and capturing the monies of the New World, and you make sure that you and your friends are able to take it. The risks are great; you've lifted many a glass of wine to departed comrades, but the rewards are more than worth it. You laugh at the Skyriggers and their foolishness in exploring the skies -- but if you had such a vessel, you'd gladly rob them as well. When not practicing the arts of piracy, you've been known to sell your services to explorers, merchants, and (when provided with the proper letters), as a privateer.

The following are Talents, Skills, Knowledges, Merits, and Flaws useful for Pirates. They are taken from the core *Mage:tSC* unless indicated otherwise.

Talents

- **Intimidation:** Many pirates rely on their ability to cower their prey. Most pirates would have Violence, Threats, or Withering Glance as specialties.

Skills

- **Artillerist:** For those pirate ships that have access to cannons or weapons of war, this is a must have. Only Hand Cannons, Sieges, and Fireworks don't see a lot of use by pirates as their specialty.
- **Climbing** *(M:tSCC)***:** Most sailors have to climb the masts at one point or another. GM's should create a new specialty, Ship to represent pirates truly at home on their vessels.
- **Leadership:** Very useful for maintaining command over a group of blood thirsty pirates. Most useful to pirates are the military, commands, and threat specialties.
- **Melee:** A mandatory skill for pirates whose infamy isn't enough to persuade their victims to surrender. Pirates normally have swords as a specialty, but improvised weapons and tavern fighting are also popular choices.
- **Pilot:** A necessary skill for those wishing to pilot the Skyriggers. Pirates would use most specialties save for Clockwork Beasts, Tanks, and Automations.
- **Seamanship** *(M:tSCC)***:** Almost a mandatory skill for those wishing to climb the ranks. The Specialties most pirates would find useful are Galleys, Great Ships, Warships, Long Trips and Storms.
- **Swimming** *(M:tSCC)***:** A mandatory skill for survival. All of the specialties are useful to the true pirate.
- **Torture:** Sadly, some rogues will not reveal where they've hidden their most precious treasures that you know they posses. Most pirates chose Machines, and Exquisite Pain for their specialties.
- **Weather Eye** *(M:tSCC)***:** A handy talent that allows the character to plan the best times to overcome sails with oar power. Almost all pirates would have the specialties of Sea.

Merits

- **Letter of Commission** *(M:tSCC)***:** A Letter of Marque is a four point Merit.
- **Well Traveled** *(M:tSCC)***:** This Merit represents the character's numerous journeys which have taken him far and wide.

The following Flaws can be used to add background to the character.

- **Beholden** *(M:tSCC)***:** Owing someone a ship would be considered a three point flaw. The former ship owner may call upon the character to do him favors with a small reminder of the ship itself. "So how is the old ship?"
- **Enemy** *(M:tSCC)***:** Many pirates have this Flaw. If a pirate is French or Muslim, Spain and its sailors would be the foe to take. This is worth three or four points depending on how much the Game Master wants to incorporate the flaw into the campaign.
- **Infamy:** Perfect for the pirate who wants his foes to know who their dealing with.
- **Oathbreaker** *(M:tSCC)***:** The character has betrayed his home nation completely and works for a foreign power. Such a character is known as a renegado if European and working for the Ottoman Empire.

Pirate Hooks

- Characters whose nationality is French, Spanish, or Muslim may be engaged in a life of piracy, or privateering when the campaign starts. The GM should make sure that they have a ship, and determining if one of the players is the captain or if they serve as first mates.
- Players may be captured by pirates and pressed into joining them. If the players prove difficult, the pirates may strand them on an isolated island and wait for the characters to come to their senses. Most spell casters should be able to escape unless another mage is leading the pirates or the place they've been marooned on has supernatural inhabitants.
- Characters that are marooned may be on an ethereal island that sinks back into the other realms, and must find their way out.
- An old friend whose wife has been captured by pirates contacts the

characters. He begs for their aid in restoring his wife or avenging her if necessary. This hook also works well for characters that have relatives. Their anger at having a parent or sibling would be powerful, and could make for engaging gaming. Pirates often take those worth no ransom and put them to the oars.

- The players are onboard a ship when they see a pirate ship under attack from a creature that looks like it would be more at home in the Void. The pirates spot the characters and send up signals begging for their help. If the characters refuse to help, the pirates start moving their ship towards the players in a mad attempt at revenge. Even if they are personally unable to finish the characters, the monster attacking their ship will! This works well for GMs allowing their players to use Skyriggers as well. GMs who have access to *Blood Dimmed Tides* should use the Gigantic Squid on pages 107 and 108.
- One of the character's homes is utterly destroyed by a Skyrigger pirate crew using a new weapon. The players are told by one of the survivors that they saw the Skyrigger take refuge in a nearby mountain and can lead the characters to it.
- The characters are visiting Tripoli as guests of the Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem when pirates come calling. This theme works well in any port city, even one that is highly defended. Some pirates brought their men in to create distractions in the city; only if such distractions are successful would they launch their attacks.
- Players could be in command of one of Ango's 70 ships. They might be on loan to different employers, fulfilling special needs that normal individuals cannot. GM's can weave the campaign around so that the players are the ones who have him imprisoned.
- The characters belong to a knightly order. This can be a historical order, such as the Knights of Malta, Rhodes, or Saint Stephen, or one that the GM creates from scratch. The GM must decide ahead of time if these are good and noble men, or simply pirates acting under cover of a fading way of life.

Weapons

Many pirates favor the cutlass, a short heavy sword with a curved blade, and the hanger, a short hunting sword. Both were easier to use in the confined spaces onboard a ship. GMs should allow Skyriggers designed by the House of Daedalus to craft Greek Fire projectors onto their ships.

Type	Difficulty	Damage	Concealment	Minimum Strength
Blade				
Cutlass	6	Strength +4	L	2
Hanger	4	Strength +2	C	1

Terms

- **Buccaneer:** A French, Dutch or English Pirate. This word does not come into use until the 17th Century and would be inappropriate for a *M:tSC* campaign.
- **Corsairs:** The French name for a Barbary Coast Pirate.
- **Pirate:** Sea Robber. Any theft at sea is considered an act of Piracy.
- **Privateer:** Working under a Letter of Marque, a Privateer is doing the work of his home country in robbing other ships. The word privateer is first recorded in the mid 17th century, but Letters of Marque have been known since the 13th century.
- **Raises:** Kings who commanded the Barbary Pirates.
- **Renegados:** European Raises who had status in the Turk Empire.

Resources

Role Playing Books

- *Blood Dimmed Tides*. Published by White Wolf. This book features sea creatures and methods of incorporating Vampires, Werewolves, and Wraiths to the Sea. In addition, the Merits and Flaws are useful for a water-based campaign. (For more information, see the Pyramid review.)
- *Castles and Covenants*. Published by White Wolf. The section entitled Ships of the Line shows several different types of vessels that are found in the Renaissance time period.
- *Pirates*. Published by ICE. (Out of print) This book enables an ambitious Game Master to carry his *Mage the Sorcerer's Crusade* into latter time frames.
- *Sea Law*: Published by ICE. (Out of print) The book has illustrations which *Castles and Covenants* lacks. Game Masters may also take with them some knowledge of sea combat and methods of handling magic on the high seas.

Non-Fiction

- **Pirates**. By Turner Press. The sections on The Lure of Spanish Gold and the Corsairs of the Mediterranean can give GM's numerous ideas and scenarios to use pirates and privateers in.
- **The Wordsworth Dictionary of Pirates** by Jan Rogozinski, published by Wordsworth Reference. A collection of people, places and miscellany on Pirates.

by Brandon Cope

Art colored by Keith Johnson

This is a follow-up to the previously published article on 25-point characters for *GURPS Fantasy* campaigns. Rather than repeat that article's introduction, only notes for using the characters in near- or far-future setting will be given.

Most character backgrounds are presented with a *Space* campaign in mind. Some details are intentionally left vague, specifically with regards to the names of planets and cities; this is so that the characters can be used, with as few changes as possible, in as many campaigns as possible. Notes on using the characters in non-Space (mainly Cyberpunk and Modern Day) settings is given after each description.

Special Note for *Cyberpunk* campaigns: Only one of the characters below has any cyberware -- it is usually uncommon in *Space* settings and unavailable in modern day campaigns, so in a "generic" article like this it would make some characters of less utility. However, as most of the character below have less than their -40 limit in disadvantages, it would be easy to keep a character at 25 points by making sure you add disadvantages equal in value of the cyberware.

The Characters

Officer Rudolph Nettles

starport security

ST: 11 [10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-1 Swing: 1d+1
DX: 12 [20] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 5 **Block:** n/a
IQ: 10 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5.75 **Move:** 5
HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: Legal Enforcement Powers (starport) [5], Alertness +1 [5].
Disadvantages: Appearance: Unattractive [-5], Duty (12 or less) [-10], Hidebound [-5], Stubbornness [-5], Unluckiness [-10].
Quirks: Doesn't believe in "the book", Uneasy around tall people, Dislikes the locals, Misses most jokes.

Skills: Area Knowledge (starport)-11 [2], Beam Weapons (Lasers)-13 [1], Driving (Car)-11 [1], First Aid-10 [1], Guns (Tangler)-13 [1], Professional Skill: Law Enforcement-12 [6], Streetwise-9 [1], Tonfa (for nightstick)-10 [1].
Gear: laser pistol, tangler, nightstick (small club), medium monocrys vest, first-aid kit, handcuffs, uniform, short range radio.
Appearance: 5'5", 145 lbs, black hair, brown eyes, white skin, 29 years old.

Rudolph Nettles, like his uncle before him, works security at the world's primary starport. His father (a widower) moved to the planet when Nettles was only nine. Due to his small size, he was mercilessly hounded by other children. Perhaps even worse, the parents encouraged such behavior against him, as the locals have a strong dislike of outsiders. Because of this, Nettles is somewhat uncomfortable around much taller people and treats locals poorly.

Nettles is dedicated to his job, but more than willing to let minor infractions slide since it means less paperwork. Also, somewhat to the ire of his superiors, he doesn't go by the book very often, taking shortcuts in procedure when they seem warranted (and he thinks he can get away with it).

Unfortunately, bad luck and a poor imagination have resulted in some of these shortcuts becoming near-disasters. He has nearly been fired several times and has been suspended twice.

Campaign Uses: Almost every party will visit a starport and many parties will do things there of at least questionable legality. Nettles is easy-going enough that the PCs should stay out of trouble unless they really annoy him or do something serious.

Other Settings: In a *Cyberpunk* setting, Nettles becomes part of corporate security. As long as his actions don't hurt the bottom line (usually the only thing that megacorps are worried with), he'll keep his job. In a Modern Day setting, Nettles fits best as a small-town cop (although he could still be a security guard). However, in most of this century, his dislike of locals will cause more problems than him side-stepping proper procedure.

Parker Gundersen

hermit colonist

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 11 [10] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 4 **Block:** n/a
IQ: 10 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5.75 **Move:** 5
HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: Acute Vision +1 [2], Disease-Resistant [5], Fit [5].
Disadvantages: Intolerance (off-worlders) [-5], Loner [-5], No Sense of Humor [-10], Semi-Literacy [-5].
Quirks: Wears his "lucky" bandana, Brags excessively, Swears frequently, Proud of ancestry.
Skills: Area Knowledge (mountains)-13 [6], Beam Weapons (Lasers)-12 [1], Climbing-11 [2], Cooking-10 [1], Knife-11 [1], Naturalist-8 [1], Orienteering-10 [2], Survival (Mountains)-12 [6], Tracking-10 [2].
Gear: laser rifle, one extra power cell, large knife (1d-1 cut/imp).
Appearance: 5'9", 165 lbs, unkempt blonde hair, brown eyes, tanned, weathered skin, 37 years old.

Were Parker Gundersen more highly skilled, he could perhaps be considered the archetypical frontiersman. Instead, he ekes out a marginal living in the mountains near the main colony site on the planet. He rarely enters the colony, often causing fights when he does.

Gundersen can trace his family tree back to the planet's original colonists; his pride in this bloodline has resulted in a great dislike of off-worlders (which, to Gundersen, includes colonists whose ancestors weren't original colonists).

Gundersen has several qualities that make him an unpleasant person to deal with: he swears constantly, brags about his accomplishments and has a severe stubborn streak. Only the fact that he dislikes being around other people even more and keeps to himself for the most part keeps him from being hated.

Campaign Uses: If the party ever has to go into the mountains, it is very likely they will run into Gundersen. Although he won't like the party (being off-worlders trespassing on his turf), a significant gift may help overcome such intolerance for a brief period. Since he knows the mountains better than any other colonist, he may be the only person the party can turn to.

Other Settings: In *Cyberpunk*, there is plenty of room for someone that has given up on society and gone to live apart from it. He doesn't really fit post-WWII campaigns, but earlier in the century (and especially in the Old West) he works well.

Fast Eddie

small-time thief

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 12 [20] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 4 **Block:** n/a
IQ: 10 [0] **Basic Speed:** 5.5 **Move:** 5
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Serendipity [15], Contact (Street, skill-15, available on a 9 or less, somewhat reliable) [2].
Disadvantages: Cowardice [-10], Callous [-6], Delusion (moderate, "All Women Love Me") [-10], Odious Personal Habit (Tactless) [-5].
Quirks: Changes hair color frequently, Easily bored, Loves motorcycles.
Skills: Beam Weapons (Laser)-12 [0.5], Climbing-10 [0.5], Detect Lies-8 [1], Electronic Operation (Security Systems)-10 [2], Escape-10 [1], Fast Talk-11 [4], Motorcycle-13 [2], Pickpocket-10 [1], Stealth-12 [4].
Gear: holdout laser, 2 power cells, light monocrys vest, mini-tool kit (electronic), motorcycle.
Appearance: 5'6", 105 lbs, short died-green hair with goatee, brown eyes, 23 years old.

Fast Eddie is an otherwise average thief with a knack for being lucky at the right time. He never knew his parents, being raised by poor distant relatives who took him in only because of the extra government money they received for the trouble. When Eddie turned 16, the extra payments ended and he was promptly kicked out. Fortunately, he had learned some valuable street survival skills, but his childhood left him unconcerned with the welfare of others.

Eddie is extremely adverse to physical confrontations and will try his best to avoid them. Unfortunately, he has a rather blunt way of dealing with people, which tends to cause physical confrontations with the kinds of people he deals with. He also, for some reason, thinks that women love him and will do anything for him.

Fast Eddie has, from time to time, tried honest work, but has quickly grown bored with the job. He finds illegal work much more exciting, and his uncanny knack of having good things happening to him has only incited him to keep on the other side of the law.

Campaign Uses: Fast Eddie can serve several purposes; picking the pocket of a PC and breaking into the party's hotel are two. He could be hired by the PC's foes to harass the party with similar tactics (on the other hand, the party could hire him the harass their foes).

Other Settings: As small-time thieves are present in virtually every setting, Fast Eddie works pretty much as written for any campaign.

Alfred Edmonds

computer specialist

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d

DX: 10 [0] **Dodge:** 4 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
IQ: 13 [30] **Basic Speed:** 4.75 **Move:** 4
HT: 9 [-10]

Advantages: Lightning Calculator [5], Mathematical Ability [10].
Disadvantages: Delusion (minor, "I'm being watched by 'Them' ") [-5], Gigantism [-10], Low Pain Threshold [-10], Skinny [-5].
Quirks: Doesn't like being called "Al", Won't play games on a regular computer ("They aren't toys."), Dreams about being "The Ultimate Hacker".
Skills: Accounting-17* [2], Computer Operation-15 [4], Computer Programming-16* [4], Conspiracy Theory-9 [0.5], Electronics (Computers)-17* [8], Literature (Cyberpunk fiction)-16** [1], Law (Tax Law)-15** [0.5], Mathematics-14* [1], Research-12 [1].
Gear: top-of-the-line laptop computer, computer tool kit, cyberpunk novel.
Appearance: 7'1", 165 lbs, black hair, brown eyes, dark skin, 24 years old.

* - includes bonus for Mathematical Ability.
** - includes specialization bonus.

The old saying that appearances can be deceiving is more than appropriate for Alfred Edmonds; few people would guess that a towering stick-figure would be a computer expert. Alfred Edmonds spent endless hours as a teenager tearing apart and rebuilding computers, as his generally poor health kept him indoors However, his father, a CPA, pushed him into accounting, which he considered a more suitable job for a young man. While Edmonds did learn a little in the field, he quickly abandoned it and dedicated himself to a career with computers. Unfortunately, it angered his father, who has not spoken to him in over five years.

Edmonds is fascinated by old-time cyberpunk stories, where a single hacker could bring down a government and get away with it, and secretly wishes he could do it himself. However, his fear of getting caught is greater than his desire of glory, so he hasn't tried yet. However, he has grown to believe that all his interest in computer hacking may have attracted the attention of some unknown group. His subsequent study of secret societies and conspiracies has only fueled the belief. Currently, this delusion is fairly mild, but could grow into something more severe.

Edmonds works freelance; while this is riskier than being a full-time employee with a corporation, it allows him to work when he wants on what he wants.

Campaign Uses: Edmonds is a bit more than a computer tech, since he actually has the skills to design computers and write programs. This is less valuable in most Space campaigns, but can come in handy in the Cyberpunk and Modern Day settings. And, is someone (government agents, hackers, recruiters for a computer company, etc.) really following him, or is it just a guilty conscience from wanting to do something illegal?

Other Settings: Edmonds actually fits best in a Cyberpunk campaign or a Modern Day campaign set after 1980 (especially the 90's).

Louise LaSalle

nightclub singer

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 10 [0] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
IQ: 11 [10] **Basic Speed:** 5.5 **Move:** 5
HT: 12 [20]

Advantages: Appearance: Beautiful [10], Musical Ability +5 [5].
Disadvantages: Compulsive Spending [-5], Greed [-15], Phobia (Death and dead things) [-10].
Quirks: Sensitive about age, Spoiled, Whines if uncomfortable.

Skills: Beam Weapons (Stunner)-11 [1], Carousing-12 [2], Musical Instrument (Keyboards)-14* [1], Performance-12 [4], Singing-19* [4], Streetwise-10 [1].
Appearance: 5'2", 115 lbs, long red hair, green eyes, pale skin, 42 years old.

* - Includes bonus for Musical Ability

Working at various low-class bars throughout startown, Louise LaSalle appears very much out of place. When she starts performing, even the roughest Marine on leave realizes she is out of place.

Nearly twenty years ago, on another planet, LaSalle was an up-and-coming singer destined for greatness until her greed got the better of her. She ran through all the good agents and most of the bad ones, while at the same time estranging herself from music executives by demanding excessive contracts. In the end, tired of her antics, the industry blacklisted her.

With what money she had left, she moved to another planet in the sector in and attempted to resurrect her career. Unfortunately, her greed again got the better of her, and this time she wasn't left with enough money to get off planet. She now works in a seedy nightclub on the outskirts of a starport.

Campaign Uses: LaSalle's main purpose is to provide background color. She could, perhaps, form a brief romantic entanglement with a male PC, though it would be an expensive one.

Other Settings: Little, if any, change is needed for Cyberpunk or Modern Day campaigns. In fact, LaSalle seems to fit best in a 1920's or 1930's campaign.

Veronica Neft

starship engineer

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 11 [10] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
IQ: 12 [20] **Basic Speed:** 5.25 **Move:** 5
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: none.
Disadvantages: Guilt Complex [-5], Phobia (Insects) [-10], Shyness (Moderate) [-10], Workaholic [-5].
Quirks: No sense of fashion, Makes origami animals in her spare time.
Skills: Electronic Operation (Computers)-12 [1], Electronic Operations (Sensors)-13 [2], Free Fall- 11 [2], Mechanic (FTL drive)-14 [6], Mechanic (STL drive)-14 [6], Mechanic (Power plant)-13 [4], Origami-12 [1], Piloting (small starship)-11 [2], Scrounging-12 [1], Vacc Suit-11 [2].
Gear: coveralls, tool belt, hand-held diagnostic scanner.
Appearance: 5'5", 125 lbs, brown hair, brown eyes, dusky skin, 28 years old.

Veronica Neft finds herself unemployed more often than not due to her very passive personality, which leads many employers to rate her poorly. This is despite the fact that she is a perfectly adequate engineer and a dedicted employee.

Unfortunately, she suffers from shyness to a nearly crippling degree, which makes it very difficult for her to deal with co-workers on a day-to-day basis. Neft is also overly dedicated to her work and takes the blame for anything that goes wrong. Due to a horrible experience when she got lost on a camping trip as a child, she has a fear of all bugs.

Neft is following in the footsteps of her grandfather, who was a Naval engineer for over thirty years. She enjoyed listening to the stories he would tell of his career and Neft became firmly convinced that starship engineers were the most important crewmembers. He taught her most of what she knows about starships; she attended technical school only because it was neccessary for certification. Due to her shyness and and other factors, she wasn't accepted into military service, but working on civilian starships is the next best thing.

Campaign Uses: Neft could easily be hired as an engineer on the same ship as the PCs (especially if the party is the crew rather than passengers). She would likely become 'invisible' even on a small ship. In non-Space settings, she would work well as the mechanic (or at least assistant mechanic) of an ops team.

Other Settings: Neft needs some changes (mainly to Piloting and Mechanic specialties) to fit into a non-space campaign. She probably works best as an aircraft or car mechanic, depending on campaign needs (she would fit in well in an *Autoduel* campaign as part of a dueling team, for example).

Captain Irvin Armando

retired Naval captain

ST: 9 [-10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-3 Swing: 1d-1
DX: 9 [-10] **Dodge:** 4 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
IQ: 13 [30] **Basic Speed:** 4.75 **Move:** 4
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Courtesy Rank (Captain) [4].
Disadvantages: Absent-Mindedness [-15], Code of Honor (Officer's) [-5].
Quirks: Speaks with a British accent, Sarcastic when irritated, Humble, Wants to "go out" in a space battle.
Skills: Administration-13 [2], Armoury (Spaceship Weaponry)-14 [4], Beam Weapons (Laser)-11 [0.5], Carousing-10 [2], Computer Operation-12 [0.5], Economics-11 [1], Heraldry (Ship's Insignia)-12 [1], Leadership-15 [6], Gunner (Starship Missiles)-12 [4], Merchant-14 [4], Savoir- Faire (Military)-14 [2], Tactics (Space)-15 [8].
Gear: laser pistol, shipboard uniform (rank buttons removed).
Appearance: 5'7", 155 lbs, black hair, balding, hazel eyes, 59 years old.

Captain Armando served 20 undistinguished years in the Navy. Most of his career was spent as chief gunner on the heavy cruiser Vigilant, until he given command of the corvette Havelock. After nearly two years of relatively uneventful anti-piracy patrols, the Havelock was destroyed when she stumbled into a previously unknown pirate's haven. Only three crewmen survived and Armando received a head injury that resulted in an untreatable, degenerative brain injury.

Shortly thereafter, Armando was given early retirement. After only two years, the desire to captain a ship became too strong, and he signed on to command a tramp freighter owned by a small shipping line. He performed well for over six years, until his war injury had progressed to the point where he was no longer able to be an effective commander. For the second time in his life, he was forced to retire.

Today, Captain Armando looks for ships willing to hire a skilled, if aging, ex-Naval captain. Some have, but he has been let go shortly thereafter, as his inability to handle minor tasks has caused severe problems. Despite this, he still seeks to rest among the stars.

Campaign Uses: The best way for an employer to use Captain Armando would be as an advisor to a ship's captain, with another person hired to serve as the captain's personal manservant (seeing to minor day-to-day details). Some employer (the party's, or the party themselves) may be willing to go to the trouble. If nothing else, he may be an interesting source of rumors.

Other Settings: The primary change is that his service was with a surface rather than space navy.

Jonnie

outlaw psi

ST: 9 [-10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-3 Swing: 1d-1
DX: 10 [0] **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 5 **Block:** n/a
IQ: 11 [10] **Basic Speed:** 5.25 **Move:** 5
HT: 11 [10]

Advantages: ESP Power 6 (requires one minute preparation, -20%) [15], Strong Will +1 [4], Telepathy Power 4 (affects men only, -20%) [16].
Disadvantages: Enemy (government agents, 6 or less) [-20], Youth (16 years old) [-4], Wealth (Poor) [-15].
Quirks: Misses his parents, Slightly paranoid.
Skills: Brawling-10 [1], Emotion Sense-10 [2], Mind Shield-9 [1], Panhandling-12 [1], Pickpocket-9 [2], Precognition-9 [1], Psychometry-9 [1], Scrounging-12 [2], Streetwise-11 [2], Survival (Urban)-11 [2], Telerecieve-10 [2].
Gear: dirty clothes, small knife.
Appearance: 5'4", 135 lbs, dirty brown hair, one blue eye, one green eye, 16 years old.

Jonnie was born to two renegade psis on the run from the government. Most of their group, a motley bunch of psis in hiding, were killed or captured in a surprise government raid. His parents placed Jonnie, then twelve, on the next passenger ship off the planet with a promise to catch up with him. Jonnie has never seen either of them since.

He shortly found himself on a strange planet with little money. Fortunately, years of hiding had given him enough skill to survive. He quickly took to begging and pickpocketing, augmented by his psionic abilities. It wasn't until three months had passed, and his parents had failed to arrive, that he began to be afraid. He waited daily at the starport for their arrival, but eventually he showed up less and less often and finally stopped coming at all.

By this time, nearly a year after arriving on planet, he was comfortable and familiar with the people and surroundings. In addition, many shop keepers have felt sympathy for him (as, by reading their thoughts, Jonnie usually knew the right thing to say) and treat him well. So far, no government agents have arrived looking for him, but it is always in the back of his mind.

Campaign Uses: Every campaign with psionics will eventually feature the psi on the run. Any PC known to have talked to Jonnie could be considered an accomplice or victim. If the party finds out about his powers, they may want to help hide him. Or turn him in. It is also possible that the party encounters him several times but never learns of his powers. And what really happened to his parents?

Other Settings: Jonnie works well in most other settings without modification. Even if psi powers are legal, a corrupt government agency (or a private group) would have reasons to capture psis.

Adolph Hauptman

freelance splicer

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 10 [0] **Dodge:** 5 **Block:** 3 **Parry:** n/a
IQ: 12 [20] **Basic Speed:** 5 **Move:** 5
HT: 10 [0] Encumbrance: None

Advantages: Biomonitor [3], Cyber Arm (right, ST 14, DX 11) [14], Cyber Eye (left, optic readout, microscopic vision x2) [13].
Disadvantages: Crippled Leg (lame) [-15], No Sense of Humor [-15], Overweight [-5].
Quirks: Alcohol Intolerance, Dull.
Skills: Area Knowledge (City)-12 [1], Guns (Pistol)-11 [0.5], Electronics Operations (Bionics)-14 [6], Knife-9 [0.5], Mechanic (Bionics)-14 [6], Physician-14 [8], Physiology-11 [2], Scrounging-12 [1], Streetwise-11 [1], Survival (Urban)-11 [1].

Gear: 9mm automatic pistol, first aid kit, mini tool kits (mechanic and electronic).
Appearance: 5'6", 185 lbs, balding with light brown hair, blue eyes, 33 years old.

Adolph Hauptman was a struggling medical student in a small school when he was caught stealing body parts from fresh cadavers and selling them on the black market. He was thrown out of medical school and jailed for three years. Because of his medical knowledge, and the lack of quality staff doctors in prison, he was allowed to assist in treating other inmates. He took the opportunity to become a reasonably competent physician.

Upon his release, the warden, knowing of both Hauptman's skills and past, hired him to work with an organlegging outfit he was running on the side. Hauptman did his job well, until the shop was raided by the police several months later. He escaped with a badly injured leg (which he refuses to let any other street doc touch) and now works only for himself, usually doing on-shot fix-it jobs for street gangs.

Campaign Uses: Hauptman's best role is as a recurring shady street doc the PCs visit after rough encounters. He'll also tell you who he fixed and when for a proper contribution to his coffers.

Other Settings: Except perhaps for Autoduel, Hauptman would have to be significantly changed for any non-Cyberpunk setting. He might fit well as an assistant of a mad scientist in a (Atomic) Horror adventure.

Snyde Corran

underworld contact

ST: 9 [-10] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-3 Swing: 1d-1
DX: 10 [0] **Dodge:** 5 **Block:** 4 **Parry:** n/a
IQ: 13 [30] **Basic Speed:** 5 **Move:** 5
HT: 10 [0]

Advantages: Contacts (two skill-15 Street, three skill-12 Business and two skill-15 Police; each is available on a 9 or less and is Somewhat Reliable) [11], Reputation +1 (as well-connected contact on the street) [3].
Disadvantages: Greed [-15], Odious Personal Habit (exceptionally unclean) [-5], Semi-literate [-5], Status -1 [-5].
Quirks: Say's he's your best friend, Annoyingly persistent, Dislikes firearms.
Skills: Area Knowledge (City)-16 [6], Carousing-10 [2], Computer Ops-14 [2], Fast-Talk-14 [4], Knife-10 [1], Lockpicking-11 [1], Streetwise-15 [6], Traps-12 [1].
Gear: Small knife, tattered and grimy clothing
Appearance: 5'7", 155 lbs, greasy brown hair, light blue eyes, 31 years old.

Snyde Corran (even he doesn't know his real name) appears to be a common dreg, and prefers to keep it that way. Despite his appearance, rumor has it that if something shady is going on in the city, Corran knows something about it, or can at least find someone who knows.

He charges a great deal for his information, though his wealth isn't apparent. Most of his money is wasted on gambling and women, though he manages to save enough to keep a half dozen caches of around $1000 each spread throughout the city.

Corran has an aversion to open combat, so he usually has a mercenary, disguised as a fellow dreg, in his employ as a bodyguard. If Corran ever encounters any trouble, he will let his guard slow down the attacker while he flees.

Campaign Uses: Almost every party needs someone with their ear to the street and Snyde is that someone, especially if the party is from off-world (or out of town) and would have a substantial penalty to their Streetwise rolls. A PC can take Snyde as a Contact for 2 points (Skill-15 Street, Somewhat Reliable, available Fairly Often).

Other Settings: Corran fits in virtually any setting with minimal changes.

Pyramid Pick

Save Doctor Lucky

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

90 cards, game board, rule sheet, $6.00

The latest board game from James Ernest, *Save Doctor Lucky*, is not so much a sequel to the popular *Kill Doctor Lucky* as it is a new version of the Cheapass Games classic. *Save Doctor Lucky* uses most of the same mechanics as the earlier version, twists some of the rules, and gives the game a face lift in the form of improved graphics. *Save Doctor Lucky* is *Kill Doctor Lucky* version 2.0, complete with an improved GUI and bug fixes.

The game comes with a four page rules sheet that features not only the efficient rules players expect from Cheapass Games, but also a drinking game for those familiar with *Kill Doctor Lucky*. The game board comes on eight pieces of card stock and depicts the rooms on four decks of a sinking ocean liner. The 90 cards are the usual card stock but, Cheapass fans take note, they are glossy on one side! The contents come in the traditional white envelope and the package sells for a bargain price. These somewhat improved components seem to herald an evolution in the quality of Cheapass Games unaccompanied by an increased price. Their next release will come in a cardboard box and will still have a low price tag.

Each of the players, who provide their own pawns as well as one for Herr Doctor, are stuck on a sinking ocean liner. In an effort to steal some glory and maybe a headline or two, each player wants to be the one to save Doctor Lucky from doom. In order to get credit, though, the winning player must save Doctor Lucky while another player can see him. Of course, the other players will attempt to foil the attempted saves.

Players begin in random rooms on the decks of the ship and with a hand of six cards. The rest of the cards are divided into four piles and placed next to each deck of the ship. The cards come in three varieties; Aid, Move, and Failure. Aid cards help players in their attempts to save Doctor Lucky. Move cards allow players to jump to various rooms on the ship, or to move Doctor Lucky to a room. Failure cards cancel Saves and prevent the Saving player from winning. (Some of the Failure cards contain a bonus logic puzzle too!)

On a player's turn, he or she may take a Snooping turn or an Active turn. A Snooping turn is simply moving to one room and picking up a card. If a deck of the ship runs out of cards, then that deck has sunk and all of the players and Doctor Lucky are forced to move up to the next deck. This puts all of the players into closer proximity and increases the likelihood of a save. If all four decks sink, everyone loses. This is an improvement over *Kill Doctor Lucky*, which lacked any kind of time limit.

An Active turn is any turn where a player uses Move cards to move his pawn or Doctor Lucky's pawn, attempts a Save, or does both of these. Anytime a player is in the same room as Doctor Lucky and at least one other player can see into that room, that player can try to Save Doctor Lucky. *Kill Doctor Lucky* fans will note that this is the exact opposite from the original game, where no one could see an attempt to Kill the Doctor. This small change to the rule alters movement dramatically as players attempt to stay close, but not too close, to each other. Any Save attempt is worth one point, but a player can use a single Aid card to add to this value. Aid cards like Safety Matches, Ice Skates (for that bothersome iceberg), and Dramamine add to the total value of the Save. Each opponent may play one or more Failure cards which range in value from one to three. If the total value of Failure cards equals or exceeds the Save value, the Save fails and the game continues. If the opponents can not play enough Failure cards, then the Saving player wins.

The main points of strategy in *Save Doctor Lucky* center on player proximity and Failure cards. Players must try to remain out of sight so that opponents can not make Save attempts. At the same time, players must be close by so that they can move into sight and make a Save attempt in a single turn. Opponents will want to play as few of their own Failure cards as possible so as to force cards out of their competition's hands. That way, there will be fewer Failure cards available when he or she attempts a Save.

While *Save Doctor Lucky* improves upon the older game by setting a time limit and by forcing players closer together the longer the game goes, it retains a couple of the original game's problems. Whenever Doctor Lucky moves into a room with a player, that player takes a turn immediately. This means that another player's turn may be skipped frequently. In our first playtest game, I got only one turn. Which illustrates the other problem with both games: Sessions can be annoyingly short. If few Failure cards show up in the initial deal, then the game will end after only a couple of Save attempts.

Even with these few problems, *Save Doctor Lucky* is a fun board game that improves upon the original and provides a great value for its price. The original game spawned a number of variants on the Cheapass Games website, many of which would translate well to this version, adding even more value to the game.

-- Brad Weier

Pyramid Pick

Mystick: Domination

Published by Anoch Game Systems

Game Design by Eric M. Lang

78 card Basic Deck, $19.99
78 card Power Deck, $19.99

This new card game from Anoch was a refreshing change from the usual glut of collectable card games (CCGs). Rather than wizards summoning creatures and spells, you play secret masters controlling the fate of the world by manipulating pawns. Who wouldn't be attracted to as game that uses tarot cards and acknowledges you one of the world's secret masters?

Each boxed set contains 78 cards, 2 11x17 playmats, a rulebook and a tutorial booklet. Each set contains enough cards and assorted paraphernalia for two players. You will require a number of tokens in addition: from 14 for 2 players up to 29 for 5. Anything can be used as tokens: coins, paper clips, M&Ms etc… Having tokens on hand is a simple matter. I suppose the game could still be played, it would just be incredibly unwieldy, more so than carrying 29 tokens.

There are a number of components to the game, and I'd like to take a moment simply to examine each one. The cards are each named after a different Tarot card: Page of cups, six of rods The Magician and so on. In play the cards are either Pawns, Actions, Environments or Major Arcana. The card stock solid, the printing clear and the art very nice. At first I was surprised by the choice of art from the 14th to 18th century, but once I understood the game it complements the atmosphere very well, especially the emphasis on Tarot and fate. The text is clear, and it is easy to recognize the suites of cards played by your opponent. The flavor text is a little jarring, but intentionally so. Each player is essentially a Bavarian illuminati who sees the world as their plaything and manipulates it according to their own Machiavellian worldview. For instance, the 3 of pentacles card is called the syndicate agent; the flavor text talks about TV and aliens but the art is a portrait of a man in stern Victorian attire. It's jarring, achronistic, very distracting, and it works. The juxtaposition of old style art with the modern text emphasizes the feel of being a secret master that's out of touch with the modern world but more than capable of molding it to their ends. Sort of a "The more things change, the more they stay the same" theme.

The two playmats are printed with 8 card silhouettes in the shape of what the game calls a Mystick cross. If you are familiar with Tarot cards you'll recognize this shape as the fortune-telling cross. . . basically a plus next to a line using 8 cards. In play this cross is used to determine successful challenges by pawns. There is a score tracker that tallies each player's victory points. The playmat also summarizes all the important game information, such as how to challenge, the round sequence and card traits. As a play aid the playmat is an invaluable resource.

Two of the cards are unique. One is a draw counter that has 0, 1, 2, 3 steps to indicate how many draws have taken place. This is important as the round resets after the third draw. Having a specific card to indicate this is a nice touch and better than having this data tallied by both players or cluttering up the playmats. The second unique card is the Proxy a blank frame card, similar to the game cards but blank. I still don't know what to do with this card as the rules don't tell you. I stacked the power tokens on it.

The final two items are the rulebook and the tutorial. The rulebook is a little confusing, but not overly so. The rules are concise and well written and certainly no more complicated than *Magic: The Gathering*; I just had a hard time visualizing the rules without playing a game. Luckily the game includes a tutorial book that walks you through a

sample two player game, step by step. Reading a booklet describing a sample game would be extremely tedious and probably of little help, if this were any other game than *Mystick Domination*. Someone on Anoch's design team is a genius. The 78 cards are divided into 2 plastic wrapped decks in the *exact sequence* as the two decks in the tutorial book. When you read the tutorial you actually play the game that is described down to each nuance and tactical gambit. Brilliant! There's no better way to learn a game than to play it and actually explaining the rules as the game is played using the tutorial is a wonderful idea.

Game play is a little clunky when you first start, but after you become comfortable with the rules *Mystick: Dominion* is very easy to play. To win you must amass the most victory points before the power pool is depleted. You gain these points by challenging the power pool or your opponent's pawns with your own pawns. Power gained is allocated to your pawns, each of which can hold a certain limit determined by their influence rating. Power is separate from victory points, but you can only gain victory points by taking power. Once the power pool is depleted the game ends and victory points are tallied, the highest total winning. The length of each round is determined by how many draws are taken, once three draws occur the round ends. This is important to gameplay as when the round ends the mystic crosses are reset and various cards leave play, essentially leveling the playing field for the next round. Each player can do three thing during a turn: Draw a card (advancing the draw counter), play a card or make a challenge. Challenging is the only way to gain power, but you must have pawns in play to do so, and it is important to choose your strategy wily in order to avoid wasting a move.

Each card is either an action, attachment, environment, or pawn. As one action during your turn you may bring one card into play. Pawns can gain you power and challenge other pawns. Attachments enhance your pawns or minimize the effectiveness of your opponent's pawns. Actions take effect immediately and are discarded, enhancements are similar but stay in effect until the round ends. Almost all of the cards have a small box of rule text that further adds to the complexity of the game. *(The Power Deck contains cards that are more complex than those contained in the Basic Deck. Neither deck requires the other to play. -- Ed.)* Having each card change the flavor and play of any games adds to the cusom9ization of the game. While *Mystick: Domination* is not a collectable card game, it does have the feel of one, mainly due to the way each card effects gameplay differently.

Challenges between pawns and by pawns on the power pool are conducted using the Mystic Cross. As the cards are all named after tarot cards, the Mystic Cross takes the form of a tarot reading in the shape printed on the playmats. Each pawn draws a number of cards equal to its influence, successes being tallied by like suites appearing on the drawn cards. All card text on drawn Major Arcana comes into play immediately and each success translates into stolen power (if the target pawn or power poll has any power). After a challenge the cards in the Mystick Cross are left in place, which means that only 8 cards can be drawn during challenges before the cross is filled; only at the end of a round (3 turns spent drawing cards) is the Mystick Cross cleared. Ending a round also causes most cards in play to be discarded, so a player has to weigh the advantages of having a clear cross against having fewer cards in play.

Casting a fortune for my Pawns made me feel a little like Solitaire reading the tarot cards for a certain Brit. It was almost as if I had no control over the fate of my pawns, but was depending upon them anyway. As a complete game for two, it is very economical, and pleasantly customizable without being collectable. The addition of tournament and deck building rules, make *Mystick: Domination* a game that has a lot of potential and replay value. There is a also a hint/add/teaser on the last page that *Mystick: Subversion* a postmodern roleplaying game coming in winter. If the RPG keeps or a uses a similar version of the challenge mechanics, this could also be a keeper -- *Mystic: Domination* certainly is.

-- Andrew J. Lucas

Romancing the Plot

Four Investigators are standing on the shore of R'leyh, facing down Cthulhu. Cthulhu kills 1D3 Investigators per round. Whose character survives to run screaming to the boat moored at the shore?

    A. The player who brought the 12-pack of Coke.
    B. The player who brought the Doritos and the bag of flavored pretzel bits.
    C. The player who not only called the pizza guy, but paid for the pizza.
    D. The game master's girlfriend who has never played Cthulhu, and thinks the Elder God is "kind of cute."

When faced with a screaming horror from beyond and the GM's girlfriend, you can only speak in vowels.

Wait. Let's back up.

Love, Buffy Style. . .

Love. Amore. Romance. It works for Shakespeare, and better yet, it works for *Buffy, the Vampire Slayer*. It is fine plot catalyst, and a handy widget in the GM's toolbox. After all, she possibly has one player who always walks into bars and asks:

    "Are there any girls in here? If so, can I *do* them? Can I roll my charisma to do them?"

Why not say *yes*? Romance-based plots are guaranteed to get one player involved in a story and drag the rest along for the ride. Need intrigue? Politics? Espionage? A maiden rescued from a tower in the dark of night? It all starts with one kiss. . . The GM's players might be geeks, but even geeks like to flirt.

A few role-playing games already target the romantically minded audience. The products from White Wolf Games are seeped in it, especially anything pertaining to the LARP lines, but the other game systems and publishers aren't blind to it -- their packaging and art, at the bare minimum, acknowledges the role of love in their games, if not base lust. Sexy art, sexy titles, and even sexy novels litter game lines. It sells, sells well, and according to the rumors, it sells to women. Someone is playing it, or else games featuring flirting, romance, and love would have died on the vine years ago. The logical jump is straightforward: if women gamers like playing it -- and by all reports they do -- then women GMs might like running it.

Effectively pulling on the heartstrings is a little more work on the GM's part than average. There are a few simple tricks a GM can use to not be heavy handed about it. In the following examples, remember that "he" for the player can easily be swapped with "she", and vice versa. There is nothing that stops female characters from being both the aggressor and the seduced. In fact, quite the opposite!

Love Affairs

Ah, sweet love. Nothing gets people going off fully cocked into danger and oblivion like sweet love.

Players get into love affairs all by themselves -- often by asking if there's a girl in the bar and reaching for the dice. A simple yes can suffice; toss in a name of a character from the handy nearby yellow pages, and make her father or husband a powerful political figure. Instant plot. Season to taste. Enjoy.

A sly GM will use the one night stand to pull the players deeper into a nest of political espionage. Sure, she's beautiful and she has amazing breasts, but she's actually the High Priestess of the Cult of Shub-Niggurath bent on destroying modern religions and replacing it with the ancient worship of the crone -- although she needs a blood sacrifice for her ritual to succeed. (Ah ha! A handy blood sacrifice! Thank you for volunteering.)

Or, she's a leader of a secret underground society, designed to infiltrate high-up government offices and destroy them with homemade explosives. Now she's invited the player and the player's buddies to join. Illegal? Nah, it's not illegal, not *really*, and not after the world government falls. We must free ourselves from corporate control! Kill them all!

Or, she's nobody. The evil army arrives and, like the right bastards they are, they take the player's new love and execute her in the town square. Bloodily. Messily. Nothing ticks off the players like a good, bloody, unjust murder of a character they were just starting to *like*. (The movie *Braveheart* is a fine source of inspiration for getting a love story to kick off a war.)

Remember, a love affair doesn't necessarily mean *sex*, nor does it mean constant nookie behind the closed door every possible moment of the game. It can be the start of a partnership, a subtly different relation with an NPC other than a business transaction, or an invitation to the higher mysteries of the plot. The thing to remember is that the player will go willingly, thinking not with his head but with something else entirely.

Shameless Manipulation

Another tactic is to make the love interest simply out and out evil. The player *did* ask for a big-bosomed one night stand in a cheap room above a bar; it's not like he (or she) wasn't asking for trouble in the first place. One day the player is just having a little out of scene fun, the next thing he knows, he's been conned into storming Castle Amber with an army of midgets dressed in clown suits. "Hey," the GM says with a grin on her face, "these things happen."

Evil lovers are a joy. The players blithely assume that their lovers like them back in some small, miniscule way. It rarely dawns on them that the lover might have been waiting in the bar for the player to come in and roll their charisma. It might not occur to the player that the GM has doctored the result of the roll behind her GM screen. (The greatest tool in the GMs toolbox, bar none, is the ability to lie about the result of a die roll.) And, of course, the player goes along with it. "Sure," the player says, "I'll sleep with the beautiful girl tonight." Soon, he's on trial for the murder of the beautiful girl's rich and influential husband, and the girl inheriting the manor and the surrounding lands.

Or, the same beautiful girl convinces the player that the king of the land is really an evil necromancer who is terrorizing the countryside. The next thing he knows, the king's blood is on his hands, and the king's guardsmen hunt the player while a twisted Duke takes the throne.

We all knew those well-drawn bosoms were good for something, and no one said GMs, especially women GMs, were ever supposed to play nice.

And that's not all!

The power of love is putty in the hands of the female player.

This isn't just the GM who can have fun with a quick love affair. The female player, saddled with a female character (or even a male one!), is quite familiar with the phenomena of "people trying to get into her pants." On quick inspection, they're not very big pants, and there isn't much room for two in there. Maybe with a size up.

If someone happens to make their way into said pants, the female player has them right where she wants them. Let the fun begin! Try a few simple requests to get the player or NPC warmed up, and work up to the big stuff. For example, this short sequence might work on an unsuspecting male character:

- "If you love me, you'll bring me some potato chips from the store."
- "If you love me, you'll bring me an AK-47, fully loaded, with the serial numbers removed so it can't be traced, and thirteen boxes of ammunition."
- "If you really love me, you'll bring me the head of Alan Greenspan, so I can reanimate it and steal his knowledge. I -- er, *we* -- can take over the New World Economy together, lover."

Sure, it's shameless and manipulating, but if it works, go with what you know.

. . . or maybe not.

It's doesn't always work.

Romance works great for dark, gothic horror with terrors behind every shadow waiting to leap out and rip off my lady's bodice. It iswonderful for chivalristic romances sprawled across the untainted, fertile land of the Roman Britons. There are many great settings for romance, but the GM needs to pick them with care. For example, it doesn't work so well when you're playing Shadowrun and you're in the middle of a run. Gun-toting maniacs are not exactly amazing sex symbols.

Players don't always get it. Or, they don't go for the plot hooks, no matter how obvious. Or, they just wanted to *do* the girl and get back to hunting the dragon.

Worse, the entire game starts to bog down with the angst. Oh, the horrible angst. The constant tragedy of love and loss, and love lost again. We're all so horrible and miserable; excuse me while I go flagellate myself with this large fish in the corner. After a while, the GM just wants to throttle everyone involved. *(I'm a huge progenitor of this, myself. There's a long line of GMs that want to throttle me. They've taken numbers. -- Em)*

There are two distinct perils of running a romantic plot to keep in mind at all times. The first one is that it's exclusive. Unless the players are into orgies, a love affair between a PC and an NPC is going to cut other PCs out of the action until the first PC's actions drag them all back in again. The second is that some players just don't fall for it. It's just not their thing, and they want less than nothing to do with romance, love and sex. They just want to play their game.

GMs should be aware of this before they start up their elaborate plots. If they're not careful, there could be a lot of trouserless NPCs sitting around, feeling unappreciated -- and there's nothing worse than a trouserless NPC.

The Game Master's Girlfriend

And then there's the other way of doing things. . .

"I'm going to let my girlfriend play in our game if that's okay with you guys," the GM says, imagining in his mind throwing in a little bit of gender mix to spice up his campaign while introducing a new player. If his girlfriend plays, he can confidently run a bunch of those hot and spicy plots he has in mind. Since she enjoys watching *Buffy*, maybe she'll like playing this game, too.

At this point in time, men and women gamers fuse into a single hive mind. For one sparkling moment, in the whole history of mankind, there is no difference between race, religion or gender. Everyone looks at each other, and nods. They all know what to say. There is only one right answer to the GM's query.

Occasionally, the group lucks out, and the GM's girlfriend gets into gaming with the group. The romantic plot spins out to a successful, and interesting, conclusion. Through the power of a mass brainwashing, she becomes assimilated into the legions of gamers, soon buying her own copy of ***Beyond the Mountains of Madness***. The hobby gains another customer through the power of *Buffy* and the lure of romance. The GM gets a gold star. There is much rejoicing.

But then again, you never know with the GM's girlfriend. It might all be a plot. . .

Running screaming into the darkness

How did four Investigators end up standing on the shore of R'leyh facing down dread Cthulhu who, while driving them insane, is going to eat them with a little bit of salsa?

It's pretty obvious, isn't it?

After reading his copy of *Call of Cthulhu*, the GM's girlfriend worked with him on a character concept. While, to the other players, she looked like yet another ditzy blond, she was really a high priestess who had pre-sold her soul out to the Elder Gods on discount. After a following the characters around, batting a few eyelashes, thrusting her breasts around, and asking a few well-placed questions, she manipulated the characters into going to a small island in the south Pacific where she could finish her ritual, which included invoking Dread Cthulhu himself.

"And hey," says the GM, "these things happen. New characters?"

* * *

Quick Informational Mad Props

The Women in Gaming web page and mailing lists live once again! If you're interested, go check it out at [Women In Gaming Home Page](#). They support both "everyone" lists and "women only" lists, along with member boards and articles. Go check it out!

A Horrific Alphabet

"Armitage had an idea that the alphabet might be something esoterically used by certain forbidden cults which have come down from old times, and which have inherited many forms and traditions from the wizards of the Saracenic worlds."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Dunwich Horror"

A fourth alphabet, a dictionary of horrifying cliché to file with the [Conspiratorial](#), [Secret-Historical](#), and [Alternate-Historical](#) Alphabets. And, more directly, to consider as set decoration for your very own Grand Guignol Theatre of the RPG. As I always do, I'll mention that what seems like cliché and predictability from the outside can seem like an irreplaceable part of the tale from within. I'll expand my usual recommendation of Diana Wynn Jones' excellent *Tough Guide to Fantasyland* to encompass J.N. Williamson's *New Devil's Dictionary*, which slathers much of this same terrain with funereal observations on the undead state of creativity in horror. But surely Williamson should know that, as Dr. Frankenstein teaches us, even (or especially) when you cobble together bits of dead matter, you can still bring it to slavering life. All it takes is a little spark.

A is for Antiquarian

Something of a transmission vector for anything musty, old-fashioned, Yellow (q.v.), or cursed. Also something of an expert on it. This means he knows enough to buy it at auction or in the junk pile, but not enough to incinerate it immediately. He also knows enough to give players vital clues about how to defeat it, but not enough to avoid dying under its tiny Knives (q.v.) or swift-winged death cloud.

B is for Blood

In bucketfuls, splashed around the room. Or in a thin trickle from an almost-invisible wound. Also consider letting blood "pool" or "curdle," or better yet "slowly drip" from something not normally associated with blood, like a flower-stem or a light fixture. However you serve it, it has to show up in its proper Hammer-films Technicolor scarlet to really kick things home; if it's dried to "a mysterious brownish stain" on the altar or wallpaper, everyone seems to take it in stride. Do not confuse it with Ichor (q.v.); the sight of Blood is a tragedy, while the sight of Ichor is a warning.

C is for Creature, The

Literally, the created thing. Whether it was created by your fevered imagination, by a mad scientist, by a dark mage, by toxic waste and a strange comet, or whatever, It Should Not Live. And what's more, it doesn't think anyone else should, either.

D is for Disembodied

It could stand for Disemboweled, but that's victim thinking. A Disembodied something, though, is scary, especially since it will skitter and crawl around the room for an uncommonly long time. Whatever you do, no matter how vitally important it may seem at the time, do not attach a Disembodied part to your own anatomy. That's what the leering, gulping, madman in the stained white coat is for, and disappointing him is even less wise than attaching The Clutching, Severed Hand to your wrist.

E is for Eggs

What The Creature (q.v.) sometimes hatches out of. Also available in seed-pod form. For best effect, finding only the shell (or rind) of the Eggs, with pools of Ichor (q.v) steaming gently in the bottom is recommended. That, or spotting them on the X-Rays (q.v.).

F is for Fainting

Afflicts neurasthenic Antiquarians (q.v.) and female NPCs in night-clothes. Especially common in milieux where Yellow (q.v.) is menacing and ominous. Oddly, seldom leads to a proper mauling; abduction by The Creature (q.v.) is apparently the most serious penalty on the books for Fainters

G is for Guns

Useless. *bang* *bang* *bang* *bang* "Why won't you die?!?" *bang* *bang* *click*

H is for Haunted House

Far scarier than you'd think, especially if it has lots of furniture to rearrange when nobody's looking, or wood paneling suitable for Offstage Noises (q.v.). Represents the violated human body, which should give anyone ideas about what to do with the windows and the basement.

I is for Ichor

What The Creature (q.v.) has instead of Blood (q.v.); it usually comes in a Dr. Brown's soda color like blue, green, or purple. Not, thankfully, in tutti-frutti. Unlike Blood, it bubbles, steams, foams, or eats away at the furniture with almost no provocation whatsoever. Also unlike Blood, its dried remnants create mystery, and therefore unease, in the minds of the players.

J is for "Just the Wind"

The worst imaginable thing to say about Offstage Noises (q.v.). It's an irrevocable death sentence for any NPC to utter this phrase, except in mocking irony.

K is for Knives

They will never, ever, ever, go out of style. Far more narratively satisfying to embed in innocent victims than almost anything else; even The Creature's (q.v.) natural talons or the Wolves' (q.v.) fangs are best described as "daggers" or "wickedly curved knives." Try and imagine all the places you really don't want a knife sticking into (or out of). Then make your players imagine them.

L is for Letters, Capital

Let the players hear you say them, especially in words like "Them," "Ceremonies," "House," or "Curse."

M is for Mannikins

Or puppets, or dolls, or ventriloquist's dummies. Toy companies seem to have stopped manufacturing the ones that are quite obviously designed solely for the convenience of homicidal entities, which is why the best ones show up only in the collection of a child-like (or deranged) Antiquarian (q.v.).

N is for Noises, Offstage

Anyone can do screams. Or even Blood (q.v.) curdling shrieks. But all kinds of noises can seem (and, in fact, truly be) creepy. Alto choruses of children's song. Creaks from the staircase leading to the attic. Scratches at the front door. The call of the whippoorwills. Consider the uncanny powers of Offstage Noises that nobody can in fact actually describe: "gibbering," "chittering," "meeping," and "burbling" are all good ones.

O is for Odors

Astonishingly underutilized arrow in the horrorist's quiver; everyone's smelled something really bad in their day that's worth any number of Offstage Noises (q.v.). Each Ichor (q.v.) has its own characteristic one. Going down into the crypt at night, by the way, is the horror equivalent to smelling the milk to see if it's gone bad.

P is for Pets

Pets come in two kinds: predator or prey. Pets either become possessed by The Creature (q.v.) (or turn rabid, or sentient, or rabidly sentient) and try to kill you and yours, or they react badly to The Creature (brindling, hissing, backing away "staring at nothing") and become lunch for it in the next scene. Authorities differ on whether it's most effective to show the Pet's dismembered corpse or to reanimate it and send it after the players. Why not both?

Q is for Quitting

Every so often, PCs think of this option. ("The Sewers? (q.v.) No way I'm going in there.") It shouldn't work. In the perfect case, you'd let them hand in their characters, and once they've rolled up all new ones, send them to investigate the situation: "The last information we had about those murders was a message from a band of wandering adventurers, who vanished after loudly denying any intention of entering the Sewers."

R is for Remains

Vital both as clues (albeit Unfinished (q.v.) ones) and as sources for horror, especially if the GM has read an anatomy textbook first. Often improved by Vermin (q.v.) swarming on them. "Smeared with intermingled Blood and Ichor (qq.v.)" is better than either alone, on human Remains at least.

S is for Sewers

With its letter-mate Subways, the urban equivalent of the Haunted House (q.v.). Always dripping with something you hope is water. Always full of Vermin (q.v.) and Odors (q.v.) and Offstage Noises (q.v.). And that's even before it becomes a warm, womblike container for the Eggs (q.v.) of The Creature (q.v.).

T is for Tentacles

Unless deliberate Lovecraftianism is intended, try "tendrils." Or "cilia." Or "extrusions." Or "ropy, slime-covered masses." Or even "rubbery things."

U is for Unfinished

What every explanation should be; the Antiquarian (q.v.) is telling the PCs where he found the artifact should be called away from the phone; the trail of hobo signs should stop at the Sewers (q.v.); the tattered Yellow (q.v.) manuscript should end with incoherent ranting rather than the binding formula; the message in Blood (q.v.) should be at least two symbols too short. Though not from lack of Blood.

V is for Vermin

There's a reason nobody wants to see rats, blowflies, cockroaches, silverfish, maggots, and their ilk under the best of circumstances. Oddly enough, when Vermin act as harbingers of evil and corruption, they're even less popular than normal. Though as unpopular as they are, nobody wants to see a Zoophagous (q.v.) madman begin eating them, either. And when Vermin all act with a single overriding evil consciousness, well, "unwelcome" doesn't even begin to describe it. There's just no pleasing some people.

W is for Wolves

Unless you're willing to do some research into pack hunting techniques or outlaw silver bullets for some bogus reason, probably best left as Offstage Noises (q.v.). Unless the characters are on a sledge or sleigh racing down a frozen river or across the steppe -- and the horses start to falter . . .

X is for X-Rays

You'd be surprised what the X-Rays will show. Nests of Vermin (q.v.), brain tumors spelling out "I Yet Live," robotic parts -- if there's Something you especially don't want to find in your insides, you can count on the X-Rays to find It for you.

Y is for Yellow

Hasn't actually been particularly horrifying, per se, since 1910 or thereabouts, except to Michael Crichton. But for about 25 years, it was the scariest color around. As a challenge, for old times' sake, think of something in the game that really shouldn't be yellow, and describe it as "yellowish." Something about that "ish" ending gets 'em every time.

Z is for Zoophagy

Devouring things alive is the kind of behavior that definitely marks the devourer as horrific, or at the very least creepily-aligned with something else horrific. Renfield did it best, of course. On the other end of the food chain, plenty of beloved Pets (q.v.) exist solely to demonstrate the Zoophagous unpleasantry of It.

Try, Try Again. . . Then Stop Trying!

Some facts about me:

- The one time I water-skied a decade ago, I didn't like it.
- I like Classical Music, but I didn't always.
- I still don't like raw onions.

Three ideas, three foci (thanks, *Champions*!):

Don't let one bad experience keep you from trying something again.

The one time I water-skied, I was pretty young. (I'm going to say twelve or so. . . but that's mostly just a guess.) Now, there are those who are natural learners of these sorts of physical activities. I am not one of them. So what was an attempt at water-skiing would be more properly called "water-dragging." Or, perhaps more accurately, "water-dragging for a very long time because the water-draggee lacked the common sense to let go of the rope despite it being painfully obvious that it wasn't going to work."

That day I WDFAVLTBTW-DLTCSTLGOTRDIBPOTIWGTWed three times; all three times were decidedly unenjoyable, and I made a solemn vow never to water-ski again. Fortunately the Supreme Court ruled in the landmark *God v. Billy* that the solemn vows of a twelve-year-old don't count once you turn eighteen; as such I could water-ski again, if I wanted to. And I may well, if the opportunity presents itself.

Because I honestly believe that one bad experience shouldn't keep you from doing something forever. In terms of gaming, don't let the one unfun game of *14K Pewter Minis* you tried turn you off from every trying the *14KPM* line. . . or, worse, keep you from playing a miniature game of any sort. As for myself, my one attempt at playing *Shadowrun* wasn't all that fun, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't try it again if the opportunity presented itself.

Of course, having said that, it's entirely possible not to like a game or activity, even though nothing catastrophic affected your enjoyment of that activity. That's okay. But keep your doors open.

Try something you haven't liked every so often, just in case you change your mind.

I grew up in a public education system that tried to foster an appreciation of classical music through the innovative "Enjoy It Or Else, You Miserable Little Urchins!" program. Under this program we would be trapped in a room with a record player hissing something enjoyable for young minds, like the Pachelbel Canon performed entirely in oboes, while our teacher Darth Osborne made sure we remained conscious to appreciate the experience. I think we also played recorders that smelled like Smirnoff; to be honest, I've blotted most of the memories.

The point is, I really didn't care for classical music, even though I'd been exposed to it fairly often in more "normal" settings than Elementary School.

But when I got to college, on a lark I decided to go to a classical music concert being performed by our university's school of music, and I really enjoyed it. Nowadays I enjoy classical music as part of a healthy musical breakfast.

On the whole I tend to try things I don't like every so often, just to make sure I still don't like them. Usually I find I still don't like them; occasionally I'm pleasantly surprised. Games are the same way; I recently discovered a pleasant surprise in the form of *[Century Station](#)*, despite not generally following Palladium's lines.

But I also don't abuse myself by constantly exposing myself to things I don't like.

Don't torture yourself with things you don't like.

I don't have a funny onion anecdote, I'm afraid; I just don't like raw onions. I never have; I may some day, but in the interim I avoid them.

I don't begrudge others their love of raw onions, I don't shun them, and I don't throw rocks at them. I just don't eat raw onions.

What always amazes me then, as I read the Pyramid newsgroup and my own e-mails, is that some folks out there continuously torture themselves by continuously reading themselves things that obviously bring them pain. Whether it's the house style of one of the big companies, or a certain game genre, or a *Pyramid* columnist that drives them nuts, they just keep exposing themselves to it over and over. And then they wail in agony: "Ick! I still hate the new editor of ***Dude: the Slacking!*** All these books are garbage!" or "Gadzooks! I can't believe they're still making ***Otterpunk*** books! Merciful fates, WHY?!?" or "Argh! Bob's latest column is the worst yet! I must score my arm yet again with the ceremonial Knife of Suckiness!"

Now, I've talked [before](#) about leaving game lines when they no longer suit you. And I can see the appeal of flipping through a new book of a game line you dislike, just to make sure there's nothing that catches your eye. But I honestly can't fathom the folks who continuously read columns or other pieces when they *know* they're not going to like them. Sure, skim one every so often to make sure you don't like it, but don't torture yourself month after month (or week after week) with one to two thousand words of agony. Likewise if you don't like a particular game type, activity, or book line, keep away from it; life is short, and there's lots of other things to do that you'll enjoy.

In my mind it's a fine line between experimentation and masochism; I may be willing to get on a pair of water-skis again, but I probably won't have a salad with onions afterwards. . . if I survive.

* * *

Just so you all know, I'm out of town for a few days. But just because I'm gone doesn't mean you shouldn't [write me](#), should the urge strike.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Kindred: The Embraced video boxed set.

(two stars) "It's a lot like a real fight -- only without all that slippery blood."

Pyramid Review

Aberrant: Teragen

Published by [White Wolf Game Studio](#)

Written by Lucien Soulban, Philippe Boulle, Josh Asheim

144 pages, $17.95

I like *Aberrant* in pretty much every fashion. I like how the system takes the basic Storyteller system and helps it to handle a super hero game. I like the setting, which reminds me of *Wild Cards* in its treatment of supers as paragons of the cult of personality.

The *Teragen* sourcebook for Aberrant details the main "villain" group of the Aberrant world. Of course, in a White Wolf game (hell, most games from the past decade) you can't really call people villains. The Teragen are Nova Supremacists, who believe that Novas should rule over the baseline (i.e. Human) masses.

Wait, that's pretty villainous! Cool. . . bad guys!

The *Teragen* book is a great example of the right way to do an organization sourcebook. It's got its flaws, but overall it's quite sublime.

The Teragen is a cute little super-villain group; they are more like a philosophical organization, except that a few of their members tend to go around killing people. *Aberrant: Teragen* is split into two parts; the first is the in character bit, with transcripts of Teragen meetings, news releases, and talk show discussions, all framed as part of a brainwashing sequence on a Utopian Nova.

It's an interesting look at the birth and structure of the Teragen organization. It also describes how the Teragen are dealing with Taint, the Quantum contamination that drives Novas to madness and mutation.

It's fairly disturbing in parts; the view of the Teragen on baselines is that Humanity messed up the world, and Novas fixed it. Why, then, should the Novas serve the humans? Of course, that view is one of the reasons for *Aberrant*'s tragic destiny. When a race of gods feels enslaved, what can be done to make them feel free short of submission? The Teragen philosophy is examined from a number of points of view, both within and without the organization. There's a sequence on a talk show and the fallout from it that's interesting.

The second part of the book contains a *lot* of useful information. There's a description of the organization of the Teragen, the various groups that make up the Teragen, and how to run campaigns dealing with each one. The most immediately interesting for me are Nova Vigilance and the Primacy. The two factions are similar in methods, but different in basic motivations. The Primacy acts aggressively to promote the Teragen agenda, which can include blowing stuff up. Nova Vigilance, on the other hand, acts to protect Novas, reacting to anti-nova sentiment across the world. They do this by smacking down anyone who tries to actively suppress novas (i.e. Geryon's neck-snapping fun with the mayor of Tampa).

The other factions are interesting, including one that runs safetowns for Aberrants, and the Casablancas, who work PR for the faction.

The book then gives you mechanics for the Teragen's great advantage; the Chrysalis.

(The following paragraph may contain spoilers; if you're an *Aberrant* player, feel free to skip it.)

Basically, Aberrants can take the Quantum taint that each Nova accumulates and channel it into them. When doing this, they enter the Chrysalis, which is a comatose state that can last for years. When it's complete, the Aberrant emerges changed. They may have changed their mental aberrations into physical ones, or gained greater control over their powers (the Chrysalis reduces experience point costs).

There are also new powers and guidelines for creating Terat characters. The Teragen's philosophy is that novas contain within themselves three aspects, Marvel, Monster, and Portent. Marvels are the shiny supers, Monsters are the hideous taint consumed ones, and Portents are what Novas will become (godlike).

The book also has info vitally useful to the GM. Not only does it tell you what the organization is like, it tells you what it's going to *be* like. White Wolf chooses, in this book, to basically lay the future of the *Aberrant* world on the table, saying "this is the blueprint. Feel free to change it." This is a very good thing. Many people who use games with an established Metaplot can complain about info changing out from under them. *Aberrant* has given us the future of the Teragen (Mal comes back; Interesting level escalates), and the forthcoming Aberrant war.

The biggest drawback to *Teragen*? No stats. I'm normally not one to complain about such things; I think if you need a character in your game, you can A) make him up in advance or B) make him up on the fly. But when you do a sourcebook on a faction, it's just polite to include some NPCs for that faction. I mean, it's likely that if you're in the Teragen or fighting them, you'll meet Geryon or the Confederate, and knowing what they can do (aside from the vague profiles that dot the book and should have been cut in favor of actual information.

Instead, all we get, aside from info on building our own Aberrants, are three PC templates. I will say I like the fact that the templates in *Aberrant* and *Trinity* have been people, not character types. Giving them names is a nice touch.

Aberrant: Teragen manages to be a great supplement, giving us a lot of useful information on the history, present status, and future of the Teragen. A couple pages of stats and I would have been as happy as a puppy.

-- Justin Mohareb

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

The Con Games

Summer has arrived in all its glory. All its glory, of course, includes not only the warmth of the sun and the later evenings of daylight savings time. For gamers, at least, summer is also the convention season, the best opportunity all year to meet and play with gamers from all over the world and to see (and buy) the latest products from the largest and smallest companies the industry has to offer. Despite being great fun and an excellent service to gamers, conventions are not easy to put on. Like your FLGS, the gaming convention is a business, even if a team of dedicated volunteers organizes and operates it. As such, it is subject to the customary rules of business that govern large-scale meetings such as conventions. This month, in honor of the recently completed Origins and next week's Gen Con, let us look into the business realities of conventions. Here come the Con Games!

All conventions have a management team. For most volunteer conventions, this group is the Convention Committee, or "Con Com," for short. They have the ultimate responsibility for everything that happens before, during, and after the convention. Before the convention, they must choose a venue, which includes estimating the attendance and figuring out how many hotel rooms attendees will need (if people are coming from far enough away to want to stay.) The Con Com will also be busy during the early going recruiting and organizing the huge number of volunteers that will be necessary during the convention, including people who will operate the registration desk, accompany Guests of Honor, serve as GM's, etc. During the convention they'll be up to their ears in emergent problems, such as missing volunteers, security issues, unhappy hotel staff or attendees, and the like. Long after everyone has gone home, this core group will be busy handling counting receipts, paying the last bills, and deciding if they want to do it all over again next year. This is a tall order for any convention, but the largest conventions, which can have as many as 25,000 attendees, are a special kind of logistical nightmare. As a result, Gen Con and Origins have had professional management for many years. While we are gaming, they will be working feverishly behind the scenes to coordinate the work of the Midwest Express Center's staff and their own small army of volunteers.

Of course, none of this is free. Conventions are an expensive proposition. The hall rental alone is an enormous burden, not to mention the cost of the computers and operators necessary to process (in the case of Gen Con) thousands of registrations and tens of thousands of individual gaming events, along with all the promotional material, magazine advertising, and event programs. They recoup this expense through two major sources of revenue, registrations and dealer fees. Registration fees, of course, are paid by individual gamers, and represent a significant fraction of the convention's income. This year's Gen Con will cost players $53, with each organized event in which they play adding to the bill. If that seems a bit steep, most conventions have discount programs available for people willing to volunteer some of their time, either as Game Masters, or serving in some other capacity. Again using Gen Con as an example, volunteers who work for at least 16 hours over the four days, receive a full four-day player badge in exchange. Since Gen Con runs all day and all night, that leaves plenty of time to play.

The other large source of revenue for conventions is selling space in the dealer's room. This gives retailers (in the case of local conventions) or manufacturers (in the case of the larger operations) the opportunity to highlight and sell their latest games as well as some part of their backlist. Prices for space in the dealer room vary by location, with the most desirable space (in front of the door, on a corner, a floating island, or the center of the hall) being the most expensive. Next time you are at a convention note where your favorite companies locate themselves. Of course, like the special programs for attendees, a convention will usually have privileged pricing and site selection for long time exhibitors and those who buy large booths.

Of course, the convention organizers are not the only ones who benefit from a convention. The exhibitors themselves expect to profit from their investment in time, travel, and inventory. For local conventions, most exhibitors are local FLGS's which can expect to make some extra sales to people who have discovered a new game at the con and who might or might not regularly shop at that particular store. They also hope to introduce themselves to the attendees with the hope of developing new customers. For manufacturers, which tend to exhibit at the largest conventions, the stakes are even higher. Game companies can, and often do, adjust their production schedules in such a way as to have brand-new product ready for a major convention like Origins or Gen Con. For most (if not all) attendees, the convention will be their first opportunity to see or buy these products. In addition, when manufacturers make sales in their booths, they

take the entire difference between the cost to produce and sell the product and its cover price. This is a significant increase in profit over selling through the regular channels. A large convention with a premiere product can often be highly profitable for a manufacturer, even after travel, accommodations, and staff salaries are taken into account. The considerable marketing value of the opportunity to meet fans, building goodwill and conducting playtest session is gravy. With all these advantages to showing at conventions, it is no surprise why Wizards of the Coast chose to release the *Players Handbook* for *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* at this year's Extravaganza in Milwaukee.

So, we've seen why convention organizers might want to go through the effort to put on a show like this, and exhibitors have a vested interest. But why should players want to spend their hard earned money to attend even a local convention, let alone one of the large national conventions. There are several answers. Firstly, there is the opportunity to meet players from all over the world. I have fond memories of playing BattleTech with members of the Mechforce UK, who come each year to Gen Con for the international tournament. A convention is also a fabulous opportunity to play games that require more time, or effort, or players, than your regular group can produce. Conventions are the only chance most people get to play with the large scale *OGRE* Macrotures, or the beautiful hand-made *Kingmaker* or *Circus Imperium* boards that some people bring.

Still, this is a business column and so there should also be some economic advantage to the attendees of a convention. Indeed there is. Conventions are the very best place to try new games. Most manufacturers organize special opportunities to learn their systems or to play a new adventure under the direction of a master GM, often the game's designers themselves. Conventions are also the very best place to buy games. From new products that have yet to see store shelves to the out of print game dealers who can hook you up with the best games of yesteryear, a convention hall is a game collector's dream. It is also an excellent place to find games that an FLGS often does not stock, such as the best German or other European games. Exhibitors will also frequently give back some of the extra profit they make selling the games direct to consumers by having some kind of "convention special" or other discount available. Many events will also offer prizes to the "winners" of each event. These prizes could be product or gift certificates provided by the exhibitors or the convention organizers themselves.

The best part of any convention is that, unlike a poker game, it is not a zero-sum game. Under the best of circumstances, everyone can win. Nevertheless, it is a business. Some understanding of the motivations of each kind of participant can help to maximize the likelihood that the convention will be a success. Convention organizers and exhibitors will do will to keep in mind their obligations to the attendees and serve them as well as they can. Attendees can help the organizers by coming to the convention and paying their fees on time. They are what make the convention amenities possible. At the same time, attendees have the right to expect that events will come off as advertised, including as much as possible, the timely presence of the GM and the fitness of the room. Everyone can help the exhibitors by patronizing their booths, and continuing to buy the new products for the games they discover at the convention. Conventions are one of the best things about our hobby. If you have never been to one, you owe it to yourself to check it out.

Additional Campaign Crossovers for GURPS Technomancer

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by Loki Carbis

Art by Ray Lunceford

GURPS Technomancer is one of the most interesting settings in the modern magic genre. But the *Technomancer* core book lists only three possibilities for campaign crossovers -- *GURPS Space*, *GURPS Time Travel*, and *GURPS Illuminati* (T94-95). But there's a lot more that could be done with the setting; here are several more potential crossovers.

GURPS Atomic Horror

A *GURPS Atomic Horror/Technomancer* crossover is best set during the standard time period of *Atomic Horror*: roughly 1945-1960. The sudden rush of magic into the world means that a whole new arms race is just beginning, and the fear of Red Witches is everywhere. And it's at this time, shocked or awoken by the Trinity Event, that the alien races who have been contending over Earth begin a phase of much greater, if still covert, activity. This alternate is all about the clash of human magic and alien science; aliens should not, under normal circumstances, have access to magic (although the addition of magic to the low-tech Loi-descended culture on Venus could prove interesting).

GMs considering this crossover will need to take into account the role of the Loi mutants in human history, particularly if ancient gods are real in the setting. Could the true gods command those who invoke them to fight these pretenders? Or are the Loi mutants the real gods, with mages merely contacting deceitful spirits?

GURPS Autoduel

The Grain Blight was perhaps the mostly deadly spell backfire of all time; literally millions died in the years following it. But most of them did not starve; they died because too many people panicked. The addition of magic did help to blunt the edge of starvation, but it also made things a lot more volatile. Although the devastation was not as bad in some ways, magic also meant that desperate people more often had a way to try to solve their problems by taking matters into their own hands. It's still a rough-and-tumble world of casual bloodshed, but the power units are magical now, and the guns all have Accuracy enchantments on them.

Additional Campaign Crossovers for GURPS Technomancer

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In this crossover, it's possible that there may be more than two Hellstorms -- people got pretty crazy during the Food Riots. If this is the case, modify all of them, even the first two, to be less strong, and less wide-ranging in their effects. This will re-draw your map of America somewhat, as places that are abandoned due to radiation in the *Autoduel* book (and the *AADA Road Atlas* series) are likely to be inhabited due to their high Mana levels in this alternate.

GURPS Black Ops

Assume for a moment that magic has always been real, and that the Trinity Event simply made it impossible to conceal that fact any longer. The lot of your average Black Operative is considerably worse in this alternate. Although many interesting new magical toys are available to the Operatives, their opponents -- who have been studying magic for centuries, or even millennia -- are always a few steps ahead of them.

And the wide availability of magic -- and the popularity of the Schools of Communication and Empathy, and of Knowledge, in particular -- means that keeping Black Operations covert is more difficult than ever. GMs may wish to come up with some new spells or magic items to help the players out a little here.

GURPS Callahan's Crosstime Saloon

This crossover probably requires less changes than any other. Callahan's is already a place where the strange and unusual happen with disturbing frequency. But in the world of *Technomancer*, things have to be a lot stranger to be considered unusual. GMs may wish to replace technobabble with magical terminology (manababble?) in this setting -- Mickey Finn would become a powerful spirit geased to cockroach-demons, and so on.

GURPS Cliffhangers

The Trinity Event occurred at right around the time that the Pulp Era was drawing to a close. But who's to say it had to be that way? A sudden influx of magic into the world could easily extend the era into the 50's and 60's. Depending upon your *Cliffhangers* campaign, there are two ways to play this. If magic already exists in the world, then all the magicians around are likely to get a lot more powerful -- and to attract followers with sorcerous abilities of their own. If there was previously no magic in the world, then the charlatans and fakers of this world may suddenly find themselves able to do things that even they thought were impossible -- and to surprise the heroes quite dramatically next time they meet.

GURPS Conan

Many people in the world of *Technomancer* already believe that there was a magical era in the far distant past. Using *GURPS Conan* could be an interesting twist on proving them right. Such a campaign would tend to focus somewhat on archaeology and ancient history, as both sides in the Cold War race to find whatever eldritch knowledge and mysterious artefacts they can before the other does -- and on things that were only sleeping while they waited for the magic to return...

This approach could also be taken with many of the historical sourcebooks as well. *GURPS Arabian Knights*, *GURPS Greece*, *GURPS Egypt*, *GURPS Camelot* and *GURPS Celtic Myth* would be particularly easy to do, but just about every *GURPS* historical worldbook includes some notes on a more mythic take on the culture it describes.

GURPS Cyberpunk/Cyberworld

It doesn't take much to extrapolate from the history in *GURPS Technomancer* and combine it with the *Cyberworld* setting. A worthwhile alternate for people who want something similar to, but noticeably different from FASA's *Shadowrun*. (A truly nasty GM could also add elements from *GURPS Cthulhupunk*.) The manaware on tomorrow's streets will almost always have been enchanted using "Quick and Dirty" methods -- and spell backfires will be even more common, and more disastrous. Magic should be expensive and dangerous, or cheap and even more dangerous. The interaction of magic and cyberspace has made that environment even more confusing -- is the entity you're dealing with an AI, a program, a spirit or a spell? Net-runners, more than anyone, need to be at least competent Thaumatologists, if not actual spell-casters themselves.

GURPS Discworld

There are several ways to approach this alternate. It could be posited that the Manafall created an area not unlike the Wyrmberg (DI28), or that magic is as quirky and as unpredictable a force in our world as it is in Pratchett's -- which would make the military use of magic a decidedly less likely occurrence. If magic isn't reliably replicable, giving different results each time, then people will be more reluctant to use it -- but those who do will have wills strong enough to dominate entire worlds, should they desire.

The other way is to inflict the Hellstorm on the Discworld itself -- only in this case, it's an explosion of technology, not magic. From whatever isolated point on the Disc, it slowly radiates out -- a comical, steampunk industrial revolution. "Moving Pictures" and "Men At Arms" are the definitive references for such a game -- GMs can choose to make the advances all-encompassing, or concentrate (as the novels do) on just one or two facets of technology.

GURPS Fantasy/Yrth

The similarities between the Trinity Event and the Banestorm are hardly coincidental -- the Dark Elves of Yrth are still trying to perfect their reverse-Banestorm spell. The Trinity detonation (and the later Zhukov explosion) have done little more than attract and permanently connect the energies of the Banestorm to specific locations on Earth. And both of them serve also as gates, just as the Banestorm did. Which direction these gates work in is entirely up to the GM -- maybe they're one way, or travel in both directions is possible. Maybe they change at random.

It's recommended that the normal *GURPS Technomancer* prohibition against the Gate College of Spells (from *GURPS Grimoire*) be relaxed for this crossover -- such magic is more likely to be researched in this alternate, and half the fun is the contrast between the two worlds. A campaign of intrigue and high sorcery, jumping back and forth between the two distinct but similarly magical worlds (and possibly others besides) offers a lot of potential for adventure.

GURPS Horror/Cabal

Magic becoming a widespread and well-known force is a mixed blessing for the Cabal. Although it does mean that they don't have to hide anymore, it also means that the enemies they face are far more likely to have sufficient power to pose a serious threat -- and that anyone crying "werewolf" will be readily believed. Picture the Cabal broken into numerous factions, split between the various answers to the question "what do we do now?" The characters could face those who wish to exterminate them, and those who wish only to get along with them -- and it's anyone's guess which side they have more in common with.

GURPS In Nomine

The Trinity Event changed the world forever -- but without damaging the Symphony. (This despite rumors of the involvement of Vapula in the design and construction of nuclear weapons.) Suddenly, the mortals had access to a force no Angel or Demon could use, and the War was a lot more complex. Magic is quite a different thing from Sorcery -- but it may take the Celestials some time to realize this fact. In the meantime, Hatiphas, the Demon of Sorcery, is likely to make Princess any day -- and no doubt the Seraphim Council will soon appoint a new Archangel to take care of this field (unless Eli returns from his voluntary exile, at least).

And what of the Marches? Ethereals in general are a lot more familiar with the whys and wherefores of magic, and the sudden availability of it on mortal planes is likely to give the Old Gods a much longed-for power boost (humans are far more willing to believe in chic neo-paganism than to accept that any organised religion had much to do with the Manafall). Heaven and Hell may find themselves embattled on two fronts -- possibly even enough to resolve some of their differences in the face of the common foe.

GURPS Mage: the Ascension

The sudden availability of magic -- even lesser magic such as this -- to the masses is a godsend for the Traditions. Suddenly, there are allies everywhere they turn, and it's no longer necessary to hide quite so much (not to mention that Paradox just got a lot more forgiving). But the Technocracy is not happy. Thousands -- soon to be millions -- of undisciplined civilians toying with reality on a daily basis? And surely neither the Nephandi nor the Marauders will be slow to seize this golden opportunity -- and what will happen when they do?

Both systems of magic can run in parallel quite easily, as long as care is taken to use the disadvantages of each to preserve game balance. GMs should be ruthless in their application of Paradox for true mages -- and the effects of Mana and skill level for magic users. It is not advisable to let a single character use both types of magic -- make them choose one or the other. (And if you're using *GURPS Vampire: The Masquerade* as well, don't forget that the Thaumaturgy Discipline will be a lot more common -- normal humans aren't the only ones affected by the Trinity Event.)

GURPS Supers/International Super Teams

The Trinity Event doesn't actually make for that different a super-powered world. Most super powers will be magically based, and the powers themselves will be a lot more common. The best way to simulate this is with the rules for Knacks (see M96). If the "Knacks are the only magic" option is used, then most people will probably not even realise that they are using magic. In this world, SuperTemps will be an even larger, wealthier and more widely respected organisation, while the IST carefully bases its teams near zones of unusually High or Low Mana -- to keep them out of the wrong hands, of course. And what of the Seeders? Perhaps the Trinity event has drawn their attention, and they will return at last to Earth...

GURPS Terradyne

The Zhukov test convinced everyone that future tests would be bad for the planet. No one said anything about other planets.

To use this alternate, some slight changes will have to be made. The nuclear blast of 2005 in the Golan Heights never took place -- instead, the crisis came to a head with the deployment of a magical-biotech weapon of unknown origin. And Pheobe wasn't blown apart by a shaped charge -- it was a deliberate use of a small nuclear device, which succeeded in its goal: to magically irradiate as much of the Martian surface as possible. The average Martian Mana level is High, with occasional Very High level pockets. There are some small pockets of lesser Mana -- as on Earth, these are largely created through the use of the Drain Mana spell. Terradyne is still the major political and economic power in this alternate (having the almost unlimited Mana resources of Mars all to itself gives it an unbeatable advantage magically, too), but it is also under a lot more threat from up and comers -- Astarte may decided to risk UPOE censure and begin terraforming Venus at any time, and there's suspicion at the highest echelons of Terradyne that someone may have beaten them to Titan -- and may be using magical means to sabotage the company's plans.

GURPS Voodoo

Magic has always been real -- the Trinity Event just made it a lot more common. . . and a lot less controlled. The years immediately after Trinity saw a mad scramble for power and numbers between the various factions of the Lodges. The Bizongues, for the most part, adopted a "wait-and-see" philosophy, although they too had to grow and change, allowing for increased powers and numbers of adepts.

What has both sides worried is that most magic users in the world are aligned with neither faction, being instead guided by spirits of various sorts -- spirits that bear far too great a resemblance to the In-Betweeners and Corruptors for anyone's comfort...

GURPS Wild Cards

The Trinity Event wasn't just what it seemed -- it was carefully manipulated by the mage-lords of Takis. Dr. Tachyon, renegade sorcerer, tried to prevent it, but no one listened. This variation on Technomancer makes Magery less of a blessing and more of a curse. 50% of those exposed to the Manafall die. Of the survivors, 50% are deformed (although still gifted with magical abilities). And the lucky remainder -- 25% of those exposed, become the Ace Sorcerers, the celebrities and powerbrokers of the magic wielding culture.

The grim 'n' gritty nature of both these settings makes them blend relatively well, but GMs need to be careful to make sure that *Wild Cards* doesn't overwhelm *Technomancer* in the mix. The revised statistics for *Wild Card* exposure given above go a ways towards this, but care will need to be taken nonetheless. Still, once you've mapped *Wild Cards*' New York onto *Technomancer*'s El Paso Juarez Metropolis, the pyrotechnics are sure to be fast and furious.

GURPS Y2K

What if it took more than just a fortuitous incantation to set up the necessary criteria for the Hellstorm to form? What if the timing had to be perfect? On December 31, 1999, as the clocks hit midnight, computers everywhere started to misbehave. Most of the problems were brought back under control fairly quickly, but some it was too late to stop. The unfortunate detonation of several runaway missiles at local dawn, or moonset, or a conjunction of Mars and Venus, or some similar event, at the various places of their impact opened half a dozen Hellstorms. With the exception of the blast that destroyed the Pine Gap facility in Central Australia, the storms are scattered more or less randomly across the Northern Hemisphere. Each of these was about the size of the Trinity Hellstorm. (Depending on what event the detonations were in conjunction with, some, or even all of these Hellstorms may be Aspected -- see M94.) Now, the world is split between three different types of social and technological societies -- those who use only magic, those who use only technology, and the Technomantic nations (although it will take this latter group some time to catch up to the levels described in *GURPS Technomancer*). Political intrigue and guerilla style border skirmishing are the order of the day. Welcome to the Brave New World.

Pyramid Review

Siege on Tolkeen: Chapter One, Sedition (for Rifts)

Published by **Palladium Books**

Written by Kevin Siembieda

160 pages; $16.95

Palladium Books' *Rifts* series is considered a veteran among games. In its ten years of publication it has run the full gamut, from the dark fantasy of *Wormwood* to the space opera of *Phase World*. Yet one of the most memorable aspects of the game has been the saga of the Coalition States, a Nazi-like regime established in the central United States (or what *was* the central U.S.), which had been introduced in the very first book of the game. Indeed, many of the books since published have explored the different aspects of this tyrannical and war-like dictatorship. Yet, *Siege on Tolkeen: Chapter One, Sedition* gives us the first taste of a series that will delve deeper into the Coalition States than anything before.

Siege on Tolkeen is planned as a six book series, with the first book being released in July and the last to be released before the end of the year. They will be written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin. The books will cover the saga of the war between the Coalition States and a small nation named Tolkeen. This conflict, which is quickly escalating into epic proportions, was hinted at in the original *Rifts* game book, and as Siembieda explains, it's something that he had intended on developing since his original design work on the *Rifts* game.

The theme of this series is the saga of war, and in Siembieda's vision war is not necessarily the thing of glory that many tales make it out to be. It is most often an atrocious and horrible beast, and unlike in many conflicts, this is in no way a simple case of the good guys versus the bad guys. The leaders on both sides are just as guilty in this endeavor, and in the end it will be the millions of ordinary people, from soldiers to farmers, whose lives will be ruined in the war's destruction. As Siembieda says of Tolkeen's leader, King Creed:

"This is war, people die. This is war, atrocities happen. This is war, where saints become monsters. However, to the victor go the spoils, and the winner, whether saint or monster, is always the hero in the end."

This outlook may seem grim, but Siembieda notes that the emphasis will be on "adventure, heroics, and personal challenge," all while trying to fight for something that's good and right in the face of such powerful adversity. The players are thus given both a tragic and epic background in which to set their story.

The first book of the series, *Sedition*, makes its objective to set the stage for the campaign by giving the war's background and a basic intro for the nation of Tolkeen (The CS will be emphasized in book two, *CS Overkill*). A full timeline is given detailing all of the events that lead up to this conflict from the very beginning. The current stage of the war is also outlined, with detailed maps given to present a good visual picture.

The book presents a great deal of new equipment and magical items that will be used by Tolkeen during the war. Some of them are old (reprinted from earlier texts), and some of them are new. Most of the items presented are Techno-wizardry items, and all of them are very interesting. Many of the new items are quite stylish and will add a great dimension to any campaign.

Several legendary artifacts are presented, all of which are incredible. They include things such as The Book of Ten (a

tome of spells of legend -- way cool!), Poor Yorick (a fortune telling skull), and the legendary Mobius (an item so powerful it doesn't even get stats, just a description).

One of the major themes of the war will be the battle of magic versus technology, and a lot is done to develop this. The Coalition States are a nation that has made its objective to hunt out and exterminate all things of magical nature and creation. Tolkeen is just the opposite, a nation that embraces magic and the enlightenment that its many forms can bring. This gives a dynamic and interesting mix, in which the two aspects will be played out one-on-one during this long and bloody conflict.

One of the finer aspects of the book is its detailed work on the strategies and tactics that these two armies will be using against each other during the war. The Tolkeenites have developed special strategies that exploit ley lines and the subversive nature of their magic. The CS has developed tactics to deal with these measures as well as their own countermeasures for sniffing out and putting a cap on magic users' abilities. On the CS side, a lot is done to explain the changes these strategies have forced the troops to undergo. The troops in this war are dynamic and changing people, not static grunts that are simply hurled at enemy bullets (or fireballs as the case may be).

A lot of adventure material is given as well, all of it centered on the Tolkeen battle fronts. It provides plenty of side adventure material, as well as plenty of opportunities for players to be introduced into this war. Siembieda's intended approach in this series is not to simply present all of the epic battles and major players who the PCs will probably never meet. Instead the focus is on the smaller battles and the lesser NPCs that just might play major parts in this grand conflict. All of these are tied in with plot threads that could easily effect the outcome of the whole war. (Note that this isn't to imply that the major players and battles won't be represented at all; they'll be covered in more depth later on.)

Despite the fact that this book truly begins *en medias res*, it is presented so that it will be very easy for new players to get into it. However, note that in order to truly use the material in this series effectively the GM will need to have access to several other books, including ***Coalition War Campaign***, ***Rifts Conversion Book One***, and ***Federation of Magic***. In addition, there are plenty of other books that will supplement this material, but aren't absolutely necessary. (As a side note, the cross referencing to other books is done very well in this book, making it easy to access information from other books as necessary.)

There are a couple of other little bonuses, such as detailed maps of the region and a comprehensive list of all magic spells ever published in the ***Rifts*** books series. And this is not to mention the excellent artwork from such people as Perez, Breaux, Beres, and others that make the book all the more enjoyable. Dave Dorman in particular gets special kudos for his exceptional cover painting.

Overall this book is an excellent buy. Siembieda has been developing this material for years, and this is his writing at its best. If the other books in this series follow as strongly as this one, then the ***Rifts*** series will finally have gotten the epic war saga that it deserves.

-- Jon Thompson

Pyramid Pick

Statosphere: The Invisible Clergy Sourcebook (for Unknown Armies)

Published by **Atlas Games**

Written by Tom Adams, Tim Dedopulos, Kenneth Hite, Daniel Ksenych, Andy Lucas, Michael D. Mearls, Rick Neal, James Palmer, John Snead, Greg Stolze, Tim Toner, John Tynes, Chad Underkoffler, and Ian Young

128 pages, $19.95 (perfect bound, softcover)

Statosphere is the latest high quality sourcebook to come out for *Unknown Armies*. It fleshes out in great detail many of the mystical elements in the *UA* universe alluded to in the main rulebook that aren't covered in *Postmodern Magick*.

In the *Unknown Armies* cosmology, the Statosphere is a mystical domain where the Invisible Clergy dwell. The members of the Invisible Clergy are semi-divine beings each embodying a particularly strong archetype in the collective unconscious of humanity, though they were once mortal. The individual members of the Invisible Clergy manipulate probabilities to shape events on earth according to their desires, often acting at cross purposes. When the 332nd member of the Invisible Clergy ascends, the Comte de Saint-Germain, the First and Last Man, will then ascend, and the universe will end.

As with *Postmodern Magick*, *Statosphere* opens with a clever little short story, this time one that offers insight about a day in the life of the Comte de Saint-Germain written by Greg Stolze.

The first chapter examines the Invisible Clergy in great detail. It includes lengthy sections on integrating the Statosphere into an ongoing *UA* campaign; ascensions (how humans become incarnated in the Invisible Clergy); the powers of the members of the Invisible Clergy; life as an avatar (someone who follows the path of one of the archetypes and who one day hopes to ascend), including common behaviors and symbology for all published archetypes to date; and details on the godwalkers (mortal incarnations of an archetype -- essentially the most powerful living avatars). This chapter also includes a section on a new type of minor magickal rituals that can be performed by anyone (called "Tilting the Statosphere") to alter probabilities in their favor, which is, after all, what the Invisible Clergy does on a much grander scale. The material in this chapter is extremely valuable to anyone curious about how avatars and the Invisible Clergy really work, and does a terrific job of elaborating on much of the rich background material in the main rulebook.

The second chapter provides sixteen new archetypes. Each archetype has certain mystical abilities (called channels) associated with it at various levels of power. The True King, the Necessary Servant, and the Hunter are probably the best of the lot. Unfortunately a few of the archetypes seem a little on the boring (or obscure) side (e.g., the Chronicler, the Confessor, the Peacemaker). The Mystic Hermaphrodite, a truly bizarre archetype followed by one of the main characters in the *UA* universe alluded to in several previous *UA* books, is also somewhat disappointing; it just doesn't live up to the hype.

Chapter Three offers an in-depth look at the House of Renunciation and includes descriptions of four Rooms in the House, as well as eight Agents of Renunciation. The House of Renunciation is a mystical place (entity?) that embodies change and entropy. Its Agents (humans who have been transformed by the House) seek out certain individuals and bring them into the House, where their personalities, motivations, and sometimes even their physical forms are radically changed -- sometimes for the better, and sometimes not. The Room of Cold Reflection and the Room of Rusted Things are probably the most interesting of the four Rooms presented. The House of Renunciation would likely have to be used very carefully in play because of its great potential for fundamentally altering the very personality of all those who enter it, including the player characters, though it does offer great roleplaying potential.

Chapter Four focuses on the Comte de Saint-Germain, offering three very different versions of him, all complete with game statistics, including the best of the lot written by Pyramid's own Ken Hite, though the other versions, penned by Messrs. Stolze and Tynes have a lot of potential as well.

The book has very few typos, and is well written and organized, though a fair amount of supporting information about the new archetypes is presented before the actual descriptions of the archetypes, which leads to some confusion. Cover and interior artwork is even stranger and more surrealistic than in previous *Unknown Armies* books. This is both good and bad. There are a number of moody and evocative black and white photographs interspersed throughout the text, and a fair number of them are just downright strange and feel more like filler material than good quality artwork.

If you are interested in finding out more about the Invisible Clergy, or are looking for more archetypes to introduce into your *Unknown Armies* game, this is an excellent buy. It's well written, informative, and, perhaps most importantly of all, it's an entertaining read for anyone interested in finding out more about *Unknown Armies'* unique take on modern occultism.

-- Andrew Byers

Pyramid Pick

Beyond the Mountains of Madness (for Call of Cthulhu)

By Charles and Janyce Engan, et al.

Published by [Chaosium, Inc.](#)

438 pages, $39.95

It's very difficult not to be intimidated by most *Call of Cthulhu* adventures. Even the least ambitious among them demand a level of erudition unmatched by other roleplaying games. To my mind, this is a good thing and one of the reasons *Call of Cthulhu* remains one of my favorite RPGs. The game rarely talks down to its players. More often than not, it gives them a remarkable benefit of the doubt, both in terms of their sophistication and stamina, the latter being especially important when one considers some of the mammoth scenarios Chaosium has produced over the years.

Yet all previous adventures pale in comparison to *Beyond the Mountains of Madness* (*BtMoM*), the single largest roleplaying game product I've ever seen (beating out the similarly massive -- and similarly good -- *Delta Green: Countdown* from the fine folks at Pagan Publishing). Weighing in at a stupendous 438 pages, *BtMoM* is described as "an epic Antarctic campaign and sourcebook," but that description is somewhat misleading. Unlike some of Chaosium's previous efforts, like the excellent *Masks of Nyarlathotep* or *Horror on the Orient Express*, *BtMoM* isn't so much a campaign book as a single adventure, divided into seventeen chapters. Together, they chronicle the story of the Starweather-Moore Antarctic expedition, as it attempts to determine the final fate of the doomed Miskatonic University Antarctic Expedition described in H.P. Lovecraft's classic tale, "At the Mountains of Madness." That's a pretty tall order -- even for a *Call of Cthulhu* adventure -- but the authors show themselves quite up to the challenge.

As you might expect, *BtMoM* is a hefty tome. Fortunately, it's binding seems quite sturdy, which is an important consideration in a book that'll be as regularly consulted as this one. The beautiful cover illustration by John T. Snyder (the same artist who rendered the cover of the current edition of *Call of Cthulhu*) is extremely evocative, showing a small airplane dwarfed by the towering peaks of the Mountains of Madness. The interior illustrations, especially those by Paul Carrick, are equally effective at conjuring up the stark beauty and utter isolation of the adventure's Antarctic setting. The book also includes a rather unremarkable map of Antarctica as it was known in the 1930's.

The seventeen chapters of the adventure are well structured if somewhat linear. Each includes a handy overview for the Keeper, as well as numerous boxed sections of text as reminders of important information. The linearity of the chapters is more problematic early on, as the characters join the expedition and assist in its preparations. Once the expedition reaches Antarctica, the tight scripting of events -- as well as the sheer immensity of their revelations -- alleviates this problem greatly. As things unfold, both the players and the Keeper will be too caught up in the storyline to notice the relative lack of options in certain chapters. Indeed, the Keeper will probably find this a blessing, considering the large amount of material he must assimilate to run *BtMoM* properly.

Fortunately, the authors have thoughtfully included over one hundred pages of appendices and handouts as aids for the players and the Keeper. This does lighten the burden somewhat, but make no mistake about it; *BtMoM* is not for the casual player. Assuming that a single chapter is played each week, there's enough material here for over four months of solid play. Like many previous *Call of Cthulhu* adventures, this one demands serious dedication if one is to get

one's money's worth from it.

The tale told by **BtMoM** is a truly epic one. Although the pacing is slow at first (sometimes frustratingly so -- early chapters involve taking inventory as an in-game activity), this only helps to build tension as the expedition arrives at its destination. In addition to seeking the fate of its predecessor, the Starweather-Moore Expedition must contend with two rival expeditions and the harsh conditions of the polar continent. **BtMoM** provides plenty of information on Antarctic weather and the state of survival gear in the 1930's, both of which add a lot of flavor to an already-flavorful adventure. Indeed, **BtMoM** can be enjoyably read as well as played. Its story, especially the last seven chapters, is a gripping one and very much in the tradition of Lovecraft.

This isn't to suggest that **BtMoM** is flawless. Besides the linearity of its plot, there's also the problem that the book provides much less staging advice for the Keeper than one might wish. Granted, this book is for experienced roleplayers, but that doesn't change the fact that running it successfully is mighty undertaking, however many years of gaming you have under your belt. Likewise, the book could have been better organized. As presented, the Keeper must flip through the book more often than I'd like, even with the nicely collected appendices. This situation may be ameliorated somewhat by the ***Miskatonic University Antarctic Expedition Pack*** (also available from Chaosium), which reproduces some of the book's handouts and other materials. Since I do not own that product, I cannot comment on its utility.

In the end, ***Beyond the Mountains of Madness*** remains a remarkable achievement. The combination of compelling storyline, unique setting, and detailed information is sure to mark this adventure as a classic. If you're a long-time player of ***Call of Cthulhu*** who hasn't played in years, you might want to dust off your rulebook and give this one a try. If you're an inexperienced player -- or even someone who isn't a fan of ***Call of Cthulhu*** -- you might even want to take a look, if only to see how an epic adventure can be made to work. ***Beyond the Mountains of Madness*** is really something special. If ever you needed reminding why ***Call of Cthulhu*** still holds such a fond place in many gamers' hearts, this adventure will help.

-- James Maliszewski

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

[Murphy's Rules](#)

Random Rewards

I am currently at 20,000 feet above Cincinnati, Ohio. I am flying home from a sad family gathering. I have just been alerted by the pilot that we may encounter turbulence. As I type this, the plane begins to shake.

I chose to fly standby, which is a perk wherein I get dirt-cheap airline tickets because my friend works for an airline at the risk of possibly getting bumped from flights.

I was bumped from four flights today. I have been in an airport or an airplane for twelve hours today. I missed the last possible flight home, and will need to spend the night with a friend in Atlanta. (Thanks, Mark!)

I have flown standby in the past with no problems. This time was not meant to be. I have traveled out of town three weekends this month. I have gamed twice.

When the counter receptionist called my name to get on this plane, I squealed with the delight of a *Survivor* survivor eating long pork. I grabbed my ticket and moseyed aboard the plane, humming "Learning to Fly" by Tom Petty.

We are currently in a holding pattern regarding the point of this column; please be patient.

Over in psychology they teach about a catchy little something called "operant conditioners with a variable ratio and variable interval schedule." (Thanks to the *Pyramid Magazine* crack psychological team, aka Mael, for this info.) The idea is simple: If action X consistently produces pleasant result Y, then the desire to do X will be less than if action X inconsistently produces pleasant result Y. What does this mean? It means that random rewards are more appreciated than dependable rewards.

This explains the appeal of slot machines and fishing, as compared to vending machines and eating at Red Lobster. With a vending machine you put in sixty cents (or, in an airport, forty-five dollars) and get a Milky Way bar. At Red Lobster you order a tasty meal and you get a tasty meal.

With a slot machine, each quarter you put in probably won't get you anything. . . but every so often it'll surprise you with the hoot of bells, sirens, lights, and coins. When fishing you won't catch something each time. . . but (presuming any skill) you'll get that spastic tug on the fishing line just often enough to delight you with your magnificent prize of seaweed. At least, that's been my experience. Regardless, the random reward is more addictive than a constant reward.

Anyway, to tie it all together (and attach it to gaming, no less!), I offer the following. If I had made my first flight at noon, like I was supposed to, I wouldn't be anywhere near as ecstatic as I am now that I made the 8:45 pm flight (after missing three others), because I have been intermittently rewarded.

Likewise, GMs, you may want to consider intermittently rewarding your players. If, each adventure, they encounter Bad Guy, fight Bad Guy, and defeat Bad Guy, get 1d20x1000 Gold Pieces, they may soon grow bored of it.

But if they encounter Bad Guy, fight Bad Guy, and usually beat Bad Guy but every so often don't defeat Bad Guy, and generally get a reward but sometimes don't, then they might appreciate the experience more than something more straightforward. If they have setbacks, then these setbacks might make the eventual victory all the sweeter.

Or if sometimes there isn't a terribly challenging Bad Guy, or even *any* Bad Guy, then when there *is* a serious challenge, it may seem more interesting. I'm currently running an *Aberrant* campaign (White Wolf's modern super-hero game that *isn't* **Mage**), and so far after three sessions I haven't introduced any antagonists of note. There have been mysteries, problems, and interesting things going on (at least, I hope), but so far no Dr. Glooms have appeared during the midst of the St. Patty's Day parade threatening all of existence. It'll happen probably at some point, sure, but in the meantime I think the anticipation is interesting to them. (In this campaign I've also "rewarded" them with their own city block in Chicago for not doing terribly much; it's also the greatest tangible reward they've received in the game so far.)

Regardless, consider mixing up your standard genre formulas; maybe your players will learn to unexpect the expected.

As I land in Atlanta having missed every connecting flight to my home city for the day, I feel good for having made that flight; sure, I'm spending the evening sleeping at a friend's house, and I might get bumped from every flight tomorrow, but maybe. . . just *maybe* I'll get that first flight home tomorrow. And then I'll be delighted all over again.

* * *

Now, I'm not telling anyone to steal, but if you happen to be on a Delta flight this summer, you might want to consider picking up a copy of their *Sky* magazine. (I'm guessing they all contain this information, but the one I'm looking at is #78.)

Why? Well, tucked in the back (behind the articles and whatnot that must be interesting to someone) is general info. From mildly useful info (like a US & World map of Delta routes... as near as I can tell, for example, someone travelling from De Moines, Iowa, via Delta would need to go through either Atlanta, Georgia or Cincinnati, Ohio) to really darn useful info, like Terminal Maps for many of the biggest airports in the world, like Atlanta/Hartsfield, Dallas/Fort Worth, and New York/John F. Kennedy International Airports. There are details about the planes, customs forms and other bits of verisimilitude I personally love to incorporate into my games. This info also seems to be on Delta's [website](), but it takes a bit of searching and isn't as swipable as a magazine if you're on one of their planes anyway.

Oh, and they say you're allowed to take it, so it's not *really* stealing. . . but it might be stretching the bounds of hospitality if you walk out with a stack of seventeen.

* * *

FYI, I'm going to be moving this week (ugh). So hopefully there won't be a situation where any of you will need to contact me posthaste. If I can survive 'til August 15th, my life should be able to reassume the full upright position.

In the event of an emergency Steven may not inflate fully; however, Steven *is* working and oxygen is flowing through him.

Thank you.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Lunch Money**, back of the box.

(Five stars) "Everybody knows to dial 911 in the case of emergency. Everybody knows that a 911 operator on the other end will dispatch police, fire and medical personnel.

Few, however, know what happens to the strange calls. . . calls of a supernatural nature?"

It's Not Easy Being Green -- And Evil

"The next day, Tom returned to that very spot to search again for his watch. Shocked, he stood in surprise! Bob's green gloves were floating in the air all by themselves. Tom then heard a voice that said: 'Don't worry, Tom. I'll find your watch for you!!!' Terrified and trembling, Tom ran all the way home, not stopping for a moment. Gulping for breath he told himself, 'Was that really Bob?!' Now you can see for yourself. If you ever go by Johnson Pond Road, look to your left. You may see Bob's green gloves."
-- Bill Ewen (Fuquay Varina Elementary School, Grade 4), "The Lost Watch" (1999)

Among the reasons to wear gloves, a reading of murder-tales will inform us, is to avoid leaving fingerprints. To leave only smudged marks indicating your passage through the scene of the crime. And the marks left by the Man With Green Gloves are, in some cases, smudged into (or out of) illegibility -- even finding the smears of blood and symbolism, to say nothing of solving the crime or piecing the clues together, will be more than ordinarily difficult. It's almost as though he never existed at all. Which, on the one hand, he didn't. On the other hand, he seems to be leaving traces even now, although it takes some eager looking to find them. And on both hands, of course, he wears his Green Gloves.

"In Berlin, there was a Thibetan monk, nicknamed 'the man with the green gloves', who had correctly foretold in the Press, on three occasions, the number of Hitlerian deputies elected to the Reichstag, and who was regularly visited by Hitler. He was said by the Initiates to 'possess the Keys to the Kingdom of Agarthi.'"
-- Louis Pauwels and Jacques Bergier, *The Morning of the Magicians*

The clearest hand-print comes from Pauwels and Bergier, and the best will in the world can't trace it back any further than their 1960 masterpiece of hintage and innuendo, *The Morning of the Magicians*. Since then, authors from Trevor Ravenscroft (beginning with *The Spear of Destiny*) to Peter Moon (in *The Black Sun,* Book IV of *The Montauk Series*) have rung changes on the theme until the legend (or myth, or recovered history, or created truth) now goes something like this:

In 1903, Karl Haushofer, German geographer and member of the Japanese occultist Green Dragon Society (a cover or rival to the Black Dragon Society from [our earlier column](#)?) met a mysterious figure known as 'Dorjieff' in Tibet for initiation into secret Tibetan mysteries. Haushofer kept in touch with two more trips (in 1905 and 1908), and through the activities of Sven Hedin, the pro-German Swedish explorer. Haushofer helped found the Germanenorden in 1912 and the Thule Society in 1918. He also helped arrange the first Sven Hedin Institute expedition to Tibet in 1926. That year a mysterious Tibetan sorcerer, the Man With Green Gloves, appeared in Berlin, meeting in secret with Hitler and the occult masterminds of the nascent Reich, and predicted Nazi victories. Between 1930 and 1942, the Thule Society, and later the Ahnenerbe-SS, launched yearly expeditions to Tibet, as the Tibetan "colony" in Berlin grew larger. SS Hauptsturmführer Ernst Schaefer returned from the 1938-1939 expedition bearing not only the 108 volumes of the *Kangschur* (a Tibetan Buddhist scripture) but also (they say) the legendary Black Termas (vile texts of magical sub-creation) and a ritual *phurba* dagger of unholy power. (Katherine Kurtz' novel *Dagger Magic* details this myth, as well.)

Less than a month after Schaefer's return, Hitler invaded Poland, launching World War Two. The Man With Green Gloves and his Tibetan Society of Green Men maintained astral (or radio) contact with Tibet, and (perhaps) with the Green Dragon in Japan. After Haushofer's son Albrecht was implicated in the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, however, the SS transferred the Tibetans to guarded camps. On April 25, 1945, Russian soldiers broke into a prisonlike compound to find seven Tibetan monks dead in a ritual circle, each slashed across the stomach with a dagger. The rest of the Tibetan colony died in unmarked German uniforms, fighting the Soviets. Rather than face trial as a war criminal, Karl Haushofer committed seppuku on March 14, 1946.

"No one else wore green gloves on stage. I had spotted ones, and one great outfit I had once was a green US army jumpsuit with bright white gloves coming out the ends of the sleeves with the tips painted bloody. I wore it on the 4th of July."
-- former Dead Kennedy Jello Biafra

Or so goes the myth, anyway. The stories, as they always will, vary. Some say one of the seven dead sorcerers wore green gloves. Some say they all did. Some say that the Man With Green Gloves stole away to the East in 1944, after the failure of the bomb plot. Or, of course, he might have just switched sides. The OSS (forerunner to the CIA) sent its own expedition to Tibet under Count Ilya Tolstoy (grandson of the novelist) and Lt. Brooke Dolan, whom Schaefer had actually accompanied on a 1931 expedition to Tibet. (Interestingly, despite having no radio equipment with them, OSS head General "Wild Bill" Donovan urged them to "keep in touch if you can." Perhaps those CIA experiments in astral communication go back a little farther than we think.) Dolan and Tolstoy made quite an impression in Tibet, celebrating the Tibetan New Year in February 1943 with the Dalai Lama -- the same day the German troops in Stalingrad capitulated. The CIA stayed in Tibet until 1974, and those alert for such things have detected Green Glove-prints not only on the CIA remote viewing experiments but on its mind-control projects like MK-Ultra and MK-Artichoke. The link-point, of course, is the CIA LSD research program -- which coincidentally produced a huge wave of interest in the Tibetan *Book of the Dead* as a guide to ecstatic states and "guided projection" into a different sphere of existence.

"Miss Skiffins was of a wooden appearance . . . I might have pronounced her gown a little too decidedly orange, and her gloves a little too intensely green . . . On Wemmick's return from working these mechanical appliances, I expressed the great admiration with which I regarded them, and he said, 'Well, you know, they're both pleasant and useful to the Aged. And by George, sir, it's a thing worth mentioning, that of all the people who come to this gate, the secret of those pulls is only known to the Aged, Miss Skiffins, and me!' 'And Mr. Wemmick made them,' added Miss Skiffins, 'with his own hands out of his own head.' While Miss Skiffins was taking off her bonnet (she retained her green gloves during the evening as an outward and visible sign that there was company), Wemmick invited me to take a walk with him round the property, and see how the island looked in wintertime."
-- Charles Dickens, *Great Expectations*

Such as the sphere contacted by Alice Bailey, a Theosophist who, after marrying the prominent American Freemason Foster Bailey in 1919, came into contact with a spiritual entity named Djwhal Khul (also known as "Master DK" or simply "the Tibetan"). In 1925, "the Tibetan" dictated *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire,* which stated that the Central Fire radiates in seven rays through a "flaming green swastika." This brings echoes not only of the Green Gloves, but of the Green Ray evoked by neo-Nazi occultist (and former Chilean ambassador to India -- next to Tibet) Miguel Serrano. As one might expect, Serrano's metaphysics are fairly opaque, but the Green Ray appears after one traverses the Black Sun -- it's the flash of resurrection into the spiritual world, the Otherwhere (Agharti?). In Tibetan mysticism per se, it's the *'od lam ljang gu* -- the green light path. (Let's all think quietly about the similarity between *ljang* -- "green" -- and Lovecraft's "Central Asian" Plateau of Leng.)

Interestingly, the Green Ray also signifies rebirth to Alice Bailey's "Tibetan" -- and the Green Dragon Society supposedly tested its initiates by having them focus their "Time Organism" or "Etheric Body" and force a seed to germinate by sheer will. This doctrine, of the internal super-spiritual force, recalls that of the Georgian mystic G.I. Gurdjieff -- also (possibly) known as "Dorjieff," the man who initiated Haushofer in Tibet. Gurdjieff practiced mystical disciplines based on exercise, rhythmic movement, and gardening -- the Green Force. Which could lead us into the Green Man, and Dionysos, and fertility gods, and all that, but let's stick to the Green Gloves. (Although it's interesting that in June of 1978 a deranged man was attacked by "phantom green hands" in the *Arbours* Centre of North London.) A picture emerges now, not of a Tibetan adept, but of a being from Otherwhere (Shangri-La? Or its rival Agharti?) materialized in our reality.

"Over hills, this lovely creature
Over mountains, over ranges
By great pyramids and sphinxes
We met drifters and strangers
Oh the sands, my lovely creature
And the mad, moaning winds
At night the deserts writhed
With diabolical things
Somewhere she lies, this lovely creature

Beneath the slow drifting sands
With her hair full of ribbons
And green gloves on her hands"
-- Nick Cave, "Lovely Creature"

The Tibetans call such a being a tulpa, or an "emanation." In Western magic, such an entity is a "thought-form," or an "egregor," a term cognate with the Greek "Grigori," the "Watchers." Perhaps our Man With Green Gloves began as an entity locked out of our world. He could only watch, sending some of his Green Ray force through adepts like Dorjieff/Gurdjieff, Haushofer, and the Green Dragons. But suddenly, something changed before 1925, when he appeared to Alice Bailey. The year after that, he arrived in Berlin, where Haushofer and Hedin had opened the way. Albrecht Haushofer wrote, just before his execution, "My father broke the seal/He sensed not the breath of the Evil One/But set him free to roam the world."

So, speaking of roaming the world, let's look at one last enigmatic traveler in Tibet, the Theosophist and "rational Buddhist" Alexandra David-Neel. She met the Dalai Lama in India in April 1912 (a month before the Germanenorden appears), and began studying Tibetan. She first entered Tibet in 1916, after beginning the study of magical techniques such as yoga and Tantra. For this illicit entry, the British expelled her from India, so she removed to Japan. (Did she contact the Green Dragon here?) From there, she passed through Korea, China, and Mongolia before arriving back in Tibet in July of 1918 (the same month the Thule Society was founded). She spent six years in Tibet learning magic -- specifically, mental communication with other planes and, most significantly of all, the creation of tulpas. Finally ready, David-Neel arrived in Lhasa in February of 1924. And, amazingly, this dedicated student of Tibetan mysticism spent only two months in the holiest city of her creed before leaving Tibet forever, arriving in India "very frail," appearing as though she had "undergone incredible hardships." Why?

According to David-Neel, she finally decided to try creating a tulpa, a "fat and jolly lama." All went well at first, but the tulpa began appearing on his own. "Now and then," she wrote in *Magic and Mystery in Tibet*, "it was not necessary for me to think of him to make him appear." He slowly grew "leaner," more "sly" and even "malignant." She claims to have sent him back behind the Black Sun, but she never returned to Tibet, preferring her French villa Samten Dzong -- the "fortress of meditation." Outside her fortress walls, then, did she hear the sharpening of the *phurba* dagger? Did she see the Green Flash overhead as the Nazi blitzkrieg tore through her adopted France? Did she, two weeks shy of her 101st birthday in 1969, manage to reach her Theosophist afterlife, safe at last from the clutch of the Green Gloves?

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by Earl Wajenberg

Art by Dan Smith

Many role-playing campaigns center on important artifacts. If you are running ***In Nomine***, ***Ars Magica***, or any other game with Jewish or Christian religious elements, items from the Bible are particularly appropriate. The Holy Grail and the Ark of the Covenant come first to mind, of course, but there are many, many more. This article lists some of them. They may feature as religious relics, vessels of spiritual power (good or evil), or archeological treasures.

The Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 3)

This is the tree that Adam and Eve plucked the "apple" from (though nowhere does it say what kind of fruit it was). By this act of disobedience, they acquired the "knowledge of good and evil" (which probably means that they came to *experience* evil as well as good, instead of understanding it in an abstract, theoretical way). They also became mortal. Fruit, wood, leaves, flowers, or seeds from this tree, or from any of its descendants, could be tempting but perilous artifacts. What kind of knowledge would a second taste of fruit give to a child of Adam? What price would it have? Might a taste "humanize" a non-human creature, putting it in the same boat with the children of Adam? What about a smell of the flowers, or a tea made from the leaves, or an object carved from the wood?

The Tree of Life (Genesis 3)

There was another tree in the Garden of Eden. A taste of its fruit gave everlasting life. Adam and Eve were driven from the garden to keep them away from it. Trees of Life line the streets of Heaven. Clearly, fruit, wood, leaves, flowers, or seeds from this tree, or from any of its descendants, could be a powerful force for healing, resurrection, or animation.

The Flaming Sword of Eden (Genesis 3)

Adam and Eve were kept out of the Garden by cherubim and by a flaming sword that moved of itself, barring the way. Such a celestial artifact would be an enormously powerful weapon, but might require very high authorization to get.

The Stone that Slew Abel (Genesis 4)

Adam was the first man. Cain was the first man born of woman. Abel was the first man dead. We don't know how Cain killed Abel, but hitting him with a rock is plausible. This first murder weapon *might* be a holy relic of the first martyr, but it might also carry a heavy charge of unholiness, powerful for necromancy and evil violence.

The Sword of Tubal-Cain (Genesis 4)

Tubal-Cain was a great-grandson of Cain and the inventor of metal-working. If the Flaming Sword of Eden seems too hard to get, a masterpiece by the earthly inventor of weaponry might be a good substitute.

The Flute of Jubal (Genesis 4)

Jubal was Tubal-Cain's brother and the inventor of musical instruments. As such, he is senior to other master musicians such as Orpheus or Taliesin. Besides being a great relic or archeological find, Jubal's flute might produce supernaturally beautiful or compelling music, or endow the possessor with great talent.

Wood from Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-9)

The Ark was about 450 by 75 by 45 feet, and made of "gopher wood" (probably a kind of cypress). It came to rest on "Mount Ararat," traditionally identified with a mountain near the Turkish-Armenian border. (But traditions aren't infallible.) It would have left a lot of wood. Samples of it would make good religious or archeological treasures, the more so if they could be well-verified. Getting or keeping these samples could involve characters in enormously twisty controversies of politics, scholarship, and religion.

Wine from Noah's Vineyard (Genesis 9)

Not only did Noah build the Ark, he was the first to make wine after the Flood; since this is the first mention of wine, he may have invented it. Such an historic vintage may not have aged well over the millennia, but it would have almost the same religious or academic value as a sample of Ark wood. And a GM can spin up a tale in which the wine of Noah is endowed by its revered maker with special powers -- control or understanding of animals, for instance.

Stones from the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11)

Shortly after the Flood, humanity tried to build a tower to reach Heaven. God foiled the attempt by shattering the single human language into many different tongues, causing humanity to scatter over the face of the Earth. The Tower of Babel is now a symbol of arrogance, confusion, and biting off more than you can chew. Bits of its masonry would not be likely to be *holy* relics. But they might be treasured as mementos by those with their own plans of overweening pride. Or they might hold some lingering power of confusion that would make them useful counter-intelligence weapons.

The Circumcision Blades of the Patriarchs (Genesis 17)

Circumcision is the physical mark of the founding of the nation of Israel. It begins with the founding patriarchs, of whom there are fifteen: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the twelve tribal patriarchs: Reuben (Jacob's eldest), Simeon, Levi, Judah (Jacob's designated heir), Isaachar, Zebulun, Gad, Asher, Dan, Naphtali, Joseph (Jacob's favorite), and Benjamin. These blades, most likely small flint knives but possibly bronze, would be prized religious relics or archeological finds, if they could be validated.

The Knife and Altar of Abraham (Genesis 22)

To test Abraham's faith, and perhaps to change the custom (for sacrificing a firstborn child was a tradition in that time

and place), God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, only to revoke the command at the last moment. The knife Abraham (almost) used and the altar, or stones from it, would be enormously significant relics to Jews or Christians. And they would certainly be woven around with controversy, since Muslims claim it was Ishmael, ancestor of the Arabs, not Isaac, whom Abraham almost sacrificed.

Joseph's Coat of Many Colors (Genesis 37)

Joseph was Jacob's favorite son. As a mark of that favor, Jacob gave him a coat of many colors, probably a richly ornamented robe. This earned Joseph the jealousy of his brothers, who sold him into slavery in Egypt. It's a long story, but has a happy ending. Joseph also had the power to dream prophetic dreams and interpret the prophetic dreams of others (notably the pharaoh). Joseph's coat might be used to induce such dreams in a later wearer, or even to enter the dream world physically.

The Rod of Moses (Exodus 4, 9, 10, 14, 17)

In freeing the Israelites from Egypt, Moses did many miracles with his staff. It turned into a serpent and back. He used it to summon two of the Ten Plagues of Egypt (hail and locusts), to divide the sea, and to give the Israelites military victory. Should any power remain in it, it would make a consummate "magic wand."

The Rod of Aaron (Exodus 7-9)

Moses' brother Aaron also performed wonders with his staff. This staff, too, changed into a serpent (and devoured the serpent-staffs of the pharaoh's court magicians), and summoned the plagues of blood, frogs, and gnats. If you can't get Moses' staff, Aaron's would be a good second choice.

The Ark of the Covenant and the Ten Commandments (Exodus 25)

The Ark is the box containing the two stone tables on which the Ten Commandments were written. It is made of acacia wood, gilded, and ornamented on top with the images of two cherubim, who probably looked like winged, man-headed bulls. God's presence, visible as the shining light of the Shekinah, was said to hover over it in the Temple. Divine power lashed out of it in response to the touch of the wicked, or even the irreverent touch of the well-meaning. Its power dried rivers and slaughtered armies. See *Warehouse 23* for an even more detailed description. Rumor has it that the real Ark now dwells in a church in Ethiopia.

The High Priest's Breastplate (Exodus 28)

Part of the vestments of the high priest was a square, golden breastplate bearing twelve gems, each inscribed with the name of one of the tribes of Israel. Such an item would be valuable as a piece of jewelry, for a start, but that would only be a complication to its value as a relic and a symbol of religious authority. An eccentric religious organization might readily decide it was absolutely necessary that they acquire this symbol. It might also carry a general aura of holiness significant in dealing with supernatural beings.

The Urim and Thummim (Exodus 28)

These were small articles carried in the high priest's breastplate, as part of his vestments. No one knows what they were, but they appear to have been some kind of lots -- dice, perhaps -- that the high priest used to inquire of God's will. What more natural artifact for a role-playing game?

The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)

At Mount Sinai, Moses was gone for forty days, listening to God. The Israelites grew disheartened and, unclear on the concept of monotheism, had Aaron make them a new god, an idol in the form of a golden calf. (They may have

decided Moses' god was the same as the Egyptian creator-god Ptah, worshipped in the form of a calf or bull.) Moses destroyed the idol, ground it to powder, mixed it with water, and made the Israelites drink it. If there is any of it left, it would just be some anonymous gold dust, but very plausibly bearing a divine curse or an aura of unholiness that might attract sinister interest.

The Fragments of the Ten Commandments, First Draft (Exodus 32)

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai and saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, he was so angry, he smashed the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments. After seeing to the destruction of the Golden Calf, he went back up for a second copy, which went into the Ark of the Covenant. But the fragments of the first set are still stones directly engraved by God Himself. Few holier relics could be imagined.

Other Tabernacle Furniture (Exodus 35-40)

While the Israelites wandered in the wilderness, their temple was the tent-like Tabernacle. In addition to the Ark of the Covenant, this contained several other spectacular objects. Later on, the Temple of Solomon (1 Kings 5-8, about 1000 BCE), the Second Temple (516 BCE), and Herod's Temple (around 30 BCE) all contained their own versions of these furnishings. They included:

- A solid gold candelabrum with seven branches, about five feet high.
- A gilded wooden altar, about three feet high, for burning incense.
- A gilded wooden table, about one and a half by three feet, for the "showbread."
- A bronze-plated altar, about seven by five by five feet, with built-in steps, for animal sacrifices.
- A large bronze basin or pool for ritual washing. Later versions were several feet across, supported by twelve brazen bulls. The first version was probably much smaller.
- A veil of fine linen, to hang in front of the Most Holy, where the Ark was kept, embroidered with cherubim.

The Brazen Serpent (Numbers 21)

One of the punishments suffered by the Israelites in the wilderness was a plague of snakes. To mitigate this, God instructed them to make a bronze snake and display it on a pole; anyone who was bitten but looked up at the bronze snake was healed. Jesus compared himself crucified to this snake (John 3). Suppose it still retains its healing power?

The Horns of Jericho (Joshua 6)

During the conquest of the Holy Land, the Israelites took the city of Jericho by ceremonially marching around the besieged city for seven days, then blowing on trumpets, whereon the walls fell down, perhaps in a divinely timed earthquake. Quite a weapon if the power was put in the horns and lingers there.

Saul's Crown (1 Samuel 11, 15)

Saul was the first king of Israel, crowned by the prophet Samuel, but later deposed by the same prophet for disobedience to God. Uneasy would lie the head that wore Saul's crown. It would be a souvenir of political and spiritual disaster and tragedy.

David's Harp (1 Samuel 16)

King David was a great musician, and wrote many of the psalms found in the Bible. His harp playing soothed King Saul, who was frantic with anxiety over being deposed by the prophet Samuel. A harp of David might still retain the powers of great music, or the ability to cast out fear and madness. Even as just a relic, it is a perfect intersection of the spheres of religion and music.

Goliath's Shield and Spear (1 Samuel 17)

The Philistine giant, Goliath of Gath, stood about nine feet tall and carried a 20-pound spear. An underling carried his shield for him. Thanks to David's sling, none of this made any difference, but those weapons, should they survive, would make fascinating curiosities, and might carry a lingering aura of unholy violence.

David's Sling (1 Samuel 17)

In his duel against Goliath, David slew the giant with a single stone from his sling, a simple leather strap. How useful if that sling retained the power of besting any foe, no matter how overwhelming.

Saul's Sword (1 Samuel 31, 2 Samuel 1)

Accursed and deposed, Saul eventually found himself bested in battle by the Philistines. Before they could kill or capture him, he tried to commit suicide by falling on his own sword, but finally had to ask an enemy to finish him off. That sword would be a souvenir of despair and military disaster.

David's Crown (2 Samuel 2)

God promised David an everlasting dynasty, culminating in the eternal reign of the Messiah. The crown of David would be a tangible symbol of divine favor at the *least*, or, at the other extreme, of status so high that any mis-handling of it could suggest blasphemy.

Bathsheba's Crown (2 Samuel 11-12)

Bathsheba was the great love of David's life, the occasion of his greatest sin (though herself apparently innocent), and the mother of his son and successor, King Solomon. Her crown would be an emblem of royal romance and beauty, but also of turbulence, passion, and the threat of tragedy. As a fantasy artifact, it might confer great beauty.

Solomon's Crown (1 Kings 1)

Solomon succeeded his father David and ruled over a golden age for the kingdom of Israel, during which the First Temple was built. Offered any gift by God, he chose wisdom. His crown could be a symbol or force for wisdom or glory, though one should remember that Solomon forsook his wisdom late in his reign. Legend has it that Solomon's crown gave the wearer the power of teleportation.

Solomon's Ring

It's not in the Bible, but legend has it that King Solomon had a ring of copper and iron, which gave him control over seventy djinn. It is also said to have given him the power to communicate with animals.

The Queen of Sheba's Crown (1 Kings 10)

Bilkis, the Queen of Sheba, heard of Solomon's divinely granted wisdom and came to see for herself. She came away impressed. That is all the Bible has to say on the matter, but legend is full of the riddle contests between the two, and of tales of a whirlwind romance. The romance has stuck tightest, and the crown of Bilkis, as a fantasy artifact, would be likely to confer beauty and romance. More mundanely, it would be an important dynastic treasure to modern Arabic aristocracy.

Elijah's Flaming Chariot (2 Kings 2)

At the end of his career, the prophet Elijah did not die, but was taken bodily up to Heaven in a flaming chariot. Such an artifact is not likely to be found on Earth or in any material realm. But angelic characters from *In Nomine* or similar supernatural figures might encounter it. It was pulled by celestial horses of fire.

The Magis' Gifts (Matthew 2)

The original Christmas presents were the gold, frankincense (a kind of incense), and myrrh (a gum resin used in perfume) given by the Wise Men at Jesus' birth. These men were probably Magi, Zoroastrian magician-priests from Persia, east of the Roman Empire. If any coins or jewelry of the gold still remain, or remnants of the frankincense and myrrh, they would make very plausible vehicles for any blend of blessing and beneficent magic.

The Holy Grail (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22)

This is it -- the relic supreme, its very name now a synonym for the ultimate goal of an arduous quest. In origin, it is simply a cup used for the wine at a Passover seder, but that particular seder was the Last Supper. According to the tales, the cup fell into the hands of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin (temple council) who secretly supported Jesus and donated his tomb for Jesus to be buried in. (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19) Legend says Joseph gathered some of Jesus' blood in the cup and, through many adventures, made his way to Britain, where he and the cup vanish into a tangle of Arthurian romance. The cup grants life and healing. Just seeing it induces mystical ecstasy. But it is very selective about who can find it.

Judas' Thirty Pieces of Silver (Matthew 26-27)

Judas betrayed Jesus to the temple authorities in return for thirty silver coins, probably Greek denarii. In remorse, he threw them back in the priests' faces, then fled and hanged himself. The money, already viewed as tainted, was used to buy a field, for use as a cemetery. Some or all of these coins would make very fitting vehicles for unholy powers or taints connected with betrayal and despair.

Wood from the True Cross (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19)

This wood was a staple of the medieval relic trade; there was enough of it circulating Europe to stock a lumber yard. Somewhere, at some time, there was some of the real stuff, if it could only be found. This, along with other souvenirs of the Crucifixion, are obviously relics of the highest holiness. Any traces of the Blood on them might arouse forensic, medical, or biotechnical curiosity of an arguably unholy sort.

The Three Nails of the Cross (Matthew 27, Mark 15, Luke 23, John 19)

Jesus was nailed to the cross with three iron spikes, one through the feet, one through each wrist. Many more than three spikes circulated in the relic trade, but as with the wood, there must have been three real ones somewhere.

The Crown of Thorns (Matthew 27, Mark 15, John 19)

In mockery of his messianic claims, the Roman soldiers put a crown of thorns on Jesus' head. Thorn crowns were another popular item in the relic trade.

Peter's Sword (John 18)

When the temple guard came to arrest Jesus, Peter struck out with his sword, to defend his Master. He cut off one man's ear, but Jesus put a stop to the struggle, healed the ear, and went quietly. That sword, being the property of a saint, would be a first-class relic and a great weapon for righteousness. Given its history, it is plausible that it would heal as well as (or instead of) wounding.

Veronica's Veil

It's not in the Bible, but tradition has it that a woman took pity on Jesus as he carried his cross up to Golgotha, and mopped the sweat from his face with the veil she had been wearing over her hair. An image of the face of Jesus was miraculously imprinted on the cloth. The woman became known as St. Veronica, and the cloth became known as Veronica's Veil. Tradition associates healing with this relic.

The Spear of Longinus (John 19)

After Jesus died on the cross, one of the Roman soldiers stabbed the body in the side with his spear, to make sure he was dead. Legend names the soldier "Longinus" and identifies him as the centurion who acknowledged Jesus to be the Son of God (Matthew 27:54). Legend also came to identify the spear as a holy relic granting military victory to its owner. It is supposed to have passed through the hands of Constantine, Charlemagne, Frederick Barbarossa, and many other kings and emperors in between -- by no means all of them "good guys," since the list includes Hitler, though he never seems to have got around to holding it in his own hands. The spear Hitler believed to be the True Spear is now in the Hoffburg Museum in Vienna. Not that this is any problem to a GM.

Christ's Seamless Garment & the Soldiers' Dice (John 19)

When Jesus was crucified, the Roman soldiers divided his clothes among themselves, as loot. One garment was left over; rather than rip it into pieces, they threw dice for it. The garment would make a good relic, of course, and might plausibly heal. The dice might also make interesting relics, though the associations with them are not holy, and possibly the very reverse of holy. The GM could present them as infernal parodies of the Urim and Thummim, or as their Christian equivalents, depending on plot requirements.

Christ's Shroud (Luke 24, John 20)

When his disciples came to Jesus' tomb on the first Easter morning, they found him gone and the tomb empty, except for one or two angels and the shroud. The Shroud of Turin is the best-known candidate for this relic, but a GM can certainly make up a different one. Resurrection itself is a plausible power for such a relic.

Visionary Items

The following items are from the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible. They all appear in a vision, and so may reasonably be discounted as having no more reality than any other dream image, even if the vision was divinely inspired. But you could have a lot of fun supposing they were more tangible than that.

The Crown of the White Horseman (Revelation 6:1-2)

Early in Revelation, Heaven sends the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse to ravage a wicked world. The first horseman rides a white horse and wears a crown. He is also the hardest of the four to interpret. During the Black Death, he was interpreted as Pestilence. Modern evangelicals often interpret him as the Antichrist. Others regard him as symbolizing Tyranny. Like the other three, he may be sent by Heaven, but he is not at all nice in himself. If you regard his crown as an object of power, it would be an evil power, causing disease or political corruption, depending on how you interpret this Horseman.

The Sword of the Red Horseman (Revelation 6:3-4)

The next Horseman rides a red horse and is generally identified as War. He carries a sword that, as an object of power, would be a weapon of nearly ultimate power for evil. It would plausibly stir up battle wherever it was taken.

The Scales of the Black Horseman (Revelation 6:5-6)

The third Horseman rides a black horse and is usually identified as Famine. He could be generalized to Poverty or economic disaster generally. He carries a set of scales. If there is power in them, it is probably to rob, cheat, and impoverish.

The Scythe of the Pale Horseman (Revelation 6:7-8)

The fourth Horseman is named Death, and though his horse is usually called "pale," the Greek can also be rendered "green." This rider of the Pale or Green Horse is not given a scythe in the Bible, but we all know what the Grim Reaper's favored instrument is, and what he uses it for. It isn't healing.

The Trumpets of the Seven Archangels (Revelation 8-9)

In the ceremonial disaster that is Revelation, seven angels blow on seven trumpets, causing disasters with each note. The seventh trumpet, traditionally said to be blown by Gabriel, is also traditionally said to herald Judgement Day. Clearly, these would be objects of power to handle very carefully, if at all, especially the seventh one.

The Angel's Censer (Revelation 8:3-5)

After the seven archangels are given their trumpets, but before they blow on them, an angel throws a censer (an incense burner) from Heaven down to Earth, where it causes storm and earthquake. It is filled with fire from the altar of heaven. Obviously, it could be a great weapon, even if used before the Last Days, but loading it might present a challenge.

The Seven Skulls of the Beast (Revelation 13:1-10)

"The Beast" of Revelation is summoned by the Devil, and looks like a crimson leopard with seven lion-heads and ten horns. He is commonly taken to be the Antichrist, who is usually supposed to be a man or a man-demon hybrid. So how would characters get hold of any of his skulls? If the monster-shape is not just a vision but a transformation the Antichrist can make, it becomes physically possible. Also, the Beast is known to rise from the dead (Revelation 13:3, 17:10) and might be construed as having seven lives. Catch him between incarnations, and you could be in possession of the skull or skulls of the Beast without having to wait for Doomsday. Whether or not such objects have any supernatural powers, they might make interesting bargaining chips for deals with demons, or be a way to delay the next Beastly incarnation.

False Fleece (Revelation 13:11-15)

The Beast has a partner, the False Prophet, who is likewise supposed to be a man (or at least humanoid) but might also have a beastly transformation. In his case, he appears as some combination of lamb and dragon. His specialty is deception and delusive miracles. Imagine getting some of the wool off this hellish lamb; it would be appropriate as the stuff of evil illusions fit to deceive, if possible, the very elect (Matthew 24:24).

The Devil's Chain (Revelation 20:1-2)

After the battle of Armageddon, an angel (probably Michael) will come down from Heaven and bind the Devil with a chain, then throw him into the Pit for a thousand years. If this chain can hold the Devil for a millennium, it can stand up to anything the PCs might want to use it for. But borrowing it would be tricky.

by Jeff Wikstrom

Imagine a place of chess, a dimension of chess, a plane of chess. A place where the rules of chess are the laws of nature, and a rook can't move diagonally any more than a penguin can fly. A place without light, or gravity, or oxygen, or anything else not specified in the rules of chess.

In 1927, Nemeniah Lindsey glimpsed such a place. Prior to his vision, he had been unmotivated, directionless, and bored, but all that changed the night of April 30, 1927. Lindsey, then a playboy of 29 staying in his father's townhouse in New York, had just returned home from a night out with friends and had just stepped into his father's library when he suddenly screamed and collapsed. The household, roused by the sound, found him lying on the floor on his back, staring up at a chess-set on a nearby table. He later reported a "curious sense of Nirvana," a feeling that "somewhere, everything made sense. . . somewhere, there was only orderly peace. . . only chess."

The heir of a sizable oil fortune, he quickly set about trying to recapture his dream and the feeling of timeless, orderly peace that had so briefly fulfilled him. Lindsey took to The Game like a madman, quickly learning the basic rules and with astonishing speed mastering conventional strategies.

His friends first scoffed at his new fancy, but gradually a few of them began to pick up his zeal. In 1929, they founded the Chess Advancement Society of America, or CASA. Its mission was singular, its method twofold.

Lindsey, in his mania, had constructed a sophisticated belief system. There is, he postulated, a place of chess, a place where all the physics could be deduced from the simple and easily memorized rules of chess. Further, he declared it possible for a sufficiently disciplined mind to, through a rigorous regimen of chess and meditation on chess, pierce the infinite distance between the Earth and that place of chess, creating a gateway to chess.

Nemeniah Lindsey's long-term goal was nothing less than traveling bodily to the place of chess, there to dwell in its "orderly peace" forever. To this end, he created the non-profit CASA, with the two-pronged agenda of promoting chess in popular culture and supporting chess masters in their ascetic life of meditation. Lindsey died in 1963, but the CASA lives on.

Today over five hundred thousand dues-paying members support it, including a disproportionate percentage of the US's wealthiest citizens and upper class.

Most of these rank-and-file members know nothing of the grandiose designs of the CASA's elite, and merely participate in sanctioned tournaments or subscribe to the newsletter. The same spark of fervor that first inspired Lindsey in 1927 and still powers the organization, however, has touched nearly all of them. These "touched" members are fervently loyal to the CASA, willing to give of their time and money to support the group and its cause. Some work for the CASA full-time, maintaining clubhouses and running tournaments and conventions for a trivial salary. Chess-players not "touched" tend to drop out of the group after a few weeks or months, finding the group to be "extremely creepy."

The group is strictly hierarchical, divided into a dozen numbered ranks. Rank is determined not by seniority or level of donation, but solely by performance at the officially sanctioned chess tournaments the CASA holds regularly. Casually, these ranks affect little, though a member who has been "touched by the dream" (i.e., suffers the Fanaticism (CASA) disadvantage) will always defer to a higher-ranked player. At the highest levels, the CASA is organized like a corporation, with an executive officer and a board of regional directors. This board of directors, though the de facto heads of the group, are not its most highly-ranked members. That honor goes to the Grandmasters.

The Grandmasters form the second prong of the CASA's attempt to pierce the veil between the known world and the world of chess. These expert players (all with a skill of 21 or higher) live Spartan lives in CASA-supported private grounds, where they spend all their time playing and studying chess. Though they make no policy decisions, the Grandmasters are revered as the spiritual head of the Chess Advancement Society of America.

Financially, the CASA is well-served. The group maintains a clubhouse in nearly every major city in North America, though some are little more than a ranch house with a dozen cheap plastic sets on card tables. The CASA is particularly well-established in the public education system; nearly every high school has a small but dedicated chess club. The annual budget for the organization is not large, but in a time of need, the CASA can draw on the resources of nearly any member.

Alice Shea

typical Grandmaster

ST: 10 [0] **Basic Damage** Thrust: 1d-2 Swing: 1d
DX: 11 [10] **Dodge:** 4 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
IQ: 15 [60] **Basic Speed:** 4.75 **Move:** 4
HT: 8 [-15]

Advantages: Claim to Hospitality (CASA members nationwide) [10], Patron (the CASA: moderately powerful; almost all the time) [45], Single-Minded [5].
Disadvantages: Bad Sight (correctable) [-10], Fanaticism (Chess and the CASA) [-15], Oblivious [-3], Obsession (playing chess) [-10], Unattractive (nerdy) [-5].
Quirks: Always looks tired [-1], Extremely nervous when confronted with black-and-white checkered pattern outside a chessboard [-1].
Skills: Chess-25* [20], Driving/TL7 (Automobile)-10 [1], Mathematics-15 [4], Nuclear Physics/TL7-16 [12], Physics/TL7-15 [4], Teaching-13 [1].
Languages: English-15 (Native), German-15 [1]

* If Chess is considered a hobby skill in the campaign, the 20 points spent would count double, giving Alice an effective Chess skill level of 35!

Alice is a former physics professor recruited into the Grandmasters. Currently she spends almost all her time at the CASA's main office in New York, where she obsessively reads transcripts of historic matches and plays games with herself. At night she dreams of chess, a dark landscape of geometric precision.

An outsider might be surprised to learn that the CASA is solidly opposed to the use of computers in chess. They reason

that no machine could ever achieve the transcendent state of mind they assume is necessary to reach chess. So far their actions have been limited to propaganda against the "soulless automatons" who defeat their brightest public lights, but if current trends continue, the CASA might be forced to take more direct action.

What is the secret of the CASA? How do its leaders inspire such loyalty, not to any individual, but to an admittedly cold and sterile ideal? What would happen if a Grandmaster somehow succeeded in "opening a way to chess?" Here are four different answers, for four different kinds of games.

- In a "straight" *GURPS Illuminati* game, the CASA is essentially a piece of zany window-dressing the Secret Masters use to hide their tracks. Investigators coming too close to discovering the truth are diverted to these mad chessmen, who, thanks to the manipulations of the Illuminati, form an above-ground secret society with deep connections and an inscrutable goal. The board of directors, like Lindsey himself, are patsies manipulated from afar with Tibetan Mind Magic and Orgone rays: there is no "place of chess" to reach, and the vision is a sham. Subliminal messages played under the muzak at tournaments are the source of the fanatical loyalty of members.
- In an *In Nomine* game, the CASA is the creation of Kropotkin, the Impudite Demon of Alienation and Servitor of Kronos. High-ranking members of the CASA are Soldiers of Hell, and they use various Songs to instill loyalty in the flock. These Soldiers, too, are being played for fools: they believe they serve the Spirit of Chess, an ineffable being whose home is the mythical "place of chess." Every Grandmaster who becomes unable to relate to anything but a chess-board advances the Word a little further.
- In a game of Cosmic Horror and Lovecraftian dread, the CASA is a secret cult of the Outer Gods. An "opening to the place of chess" would signal the death-knell for humanity, for it would be an opening through which the Great Ones could reach Earth and gain dominion over all. The board of directors, like the Grandmasters, are almost all totally mad, the result of having been touched by a higher power. It's only a matter of time until their mad ritualized chess-games have the desired effect and an army of Implacable Pawns from Beyond Space-Time, Knights of the Outer Gods, and Rooks of Azathoth overrun the earth. . . unless someone stops them.
- Finally, it's just barely possible, in a sufficiently weird and Illuminated game, that the CASA is genuinely on to something. Lindsey's vision was the result of a thousand years of slow build-up of belief, a weakening of the walls between this world and the next. The fiery meme of the place of chess spreads because it is true, and the human mind craves Truth. Lindsey himself did not die; he ascended into Chess. And he was only the first: several Grandmasters reach the same state of perfect contemplation every year. As yet, the goal of a permanent portal to the otherness of chess has not been realized, but progress is made every year. The Nine Secret Masters of Shangri-La would pay dearly to learn the Truth behind this strange path to ascension, but so far the secrets of the CASA remain its own.

In any case, the CASA can make a dangerous foe if provoked. Though its organization is hierarchical, and its head is poorly defended, the loss of the New York compound would do little more than frighten the regional managers and day-to-day personnel, not to mention the low-level members.

It's hard to kill a dream.

And the remainder of the CASA would launch a counterattack in short order.

It's important to keep in mind that the group can, in times of crisis, call on the resources of any of its fanatical followers, most of whom are upper-middle class, highly skilled professionals. By its very nature, the CASA has at its disposal a complex web of operatives, all of whom are fanatically loyal, trust one another implicitly, are relied on by society, and cannot be compromised. An fanatical accountant has no qualms embezzling funds from her employer "for the cause." A fanatical judge finds in favor of the equally fanatical man whose lapel-pin is in the shape of a pawn. A fanatical multimillionaire dying of cancer makes the CASA his sole heir. A fanatical college student calmly drives a rental truck loaded with explosives into the side of a building full of the CASA's enemies.

Its principal weakness, of course, is a lack of communication among these operatives. Other than a master database of rankings and the CASA's newsletter subscription list, both of which are kept at the main New York headquarters, the group has no official roster. If the head of a local chapter finds his address book destroyed, he's going to have a hard time contacting his subordinates. He might know a few of them by name, but the chess-intensive lifestyle is not

conducive to a social network.

Adventure Seeds

- A friend of the player-characters (or even one of their number) a renowned expert on an obscure branch of science, is introduced to, and joins, the CASA. The members are friendly enough, but. . . strange. Over a period of weeks, the organization begins to make demands on the character's time and knowledge: calling him or her in the middle of the night to confirm that in a hypothetical eight-dimensional semi-structured matrix of non-space, time does not function quasi-relativistically. Interest is piqued: why does a chess club want to know about quantum physics?
- A sudden wave of anti-chess hysteria sweeps the nation after a well-known master player is found, victim of suicide. "Think of the children" editorials decrying the game fill the newspapers, Internet, and cable news channels. On close examination, however, some evidence suggests the suicide was actually a homicide. Is someone raising public opinion against the CASA, and if so, who? Why isn't the CASA countering with its members in the media?
- An associate of the player-characters, a low-ranking member of the CASA, suddenly disappears. On investigation it becomes clear she went willingly: her bank accounts have been cleared out and a suitcase is missing. Research suggests she's only the latest in a string of missing persons, all of whom can be linked to the CASA. Where are these people going, and why?
- One of the world preeminent experts on artificial intelligence contacts the PCs in hopes they can defend her from mysterious assassins who dress in white and black. The CASA has an obvious motivation. . . is it too obvious? Are they being framed? Is this a setup? Why doesn't the "expert on artificial intelligence" look like her passport photo?
- The CASA hires the player-characters to search for a missing member. Curiously, the chess-player disappeared more than three years ago, but a search is only just now being mounted. . . or so the CASA says. Why did they wait so long? What's really going on?
- It was inevitable: first high-school chess clubs, then junior high. Now the CASA is lobbying for chess to be a part of the elementary school curriculum. Why now, and why is the Department of Education so dead-set against it? Does it have something to do with the new afterschool cartoon, "Bishop and Queenie?"

* * *

The CASA is based (VERY!) loosely on the real-life United States Chess Federation, which maintains an excellent web site at http://www.uschess.org. Scott McCloud's equally excellent comic strip "My Obsession with Chess" formed the primary inspiration for this article, and can be viewed at http://www.scottmccloud.com/comics/chess/chess.html. Another view of chess can be found in Ken Hite's "Suppressed Transmission" for August 21, 1998.

Thoughts of Empire: A Gamer's Manual of Interstellar Colonization

by C. A. Johnson

At last it happened. Mankind has somehow outwitted the speed of light and found a way to navigate the vast gulfs between the stars. Whether by some form of FTL propulsion, relativistic fusion drives, or long voyages in cold-sleep; we're finally able to colonize other worlds.

Now what?

For the average roleplayer, this isn't an important question. For the game master with a detail fetish, however, it is the important question. How did we do it? We couldn't very well just pile a bunch of people and equipment into a ship and launch it into the void, on the off chance we found something nice and hospitable to set them up on. It just doesn't work that way. Colonizing is a tough business, and isn't something entered into lightly. Only the very serious will go to the stars in the beginning.

Here are some things to consider when creating a colony. While they can easily be used to begin a campaign, they can influence any Space campaign if used correctly. Even in developed universes the details of how a colony began will enable a GM to include a lot of color and depth to a world.

Into the Wild Black Yonder. . .

The first question that needs to be asked is: why? What inspires us to finally leave the nursery of Earth? Historically, there have been two primary motives for creating a colony. The first is profit. The best example of this is the early settling of Canada and the Caribbean. Canada was a cornucopia of raw materials for France. Fur, timber and easy access to some of the best fishing and whaling in the world gave the French government a huge economic boost. The Caribbean likewise made the Spanish rich in sugar, cotton and tobacco. (And gold, of course. Never forget the gold.)

The second motive is a desire for change. The settling of New England and Australia each provide examples of that. The Pilgrims came to New England fleeing religious persecution. They sought a place where they could live the way they chose. Australia is a slightly different story. The pioneers of Australia were exiled as criminals and rabble-rousers. It was their home that desired the change!

Answering this first question will tell you a lot about a colony, especially when considered with the other details of your campaign. Profit minded groups of settlers have a different set of priorities from a group of pilgrims. First and foremost, they will keep lines of communication open with their parent organization, whatever it might be. Whether by constructing spaceports or communication facilities, this will be a priority for the profiteering colonizer. Almost equally high on the priority list will be to get production moving. This changes the payload of the initial colony ship considerably, with heavier equipment taking up mass that might be used for survival gear in other situations.

Usually transients staff this kind of colony. Almost no one moves there permanently . . .at least at first. The first wave would be mostly construction personnel to get facilities up and running. Depending on the environment there may be soldiers providing security, or scientists looking for other profitable ventures to engage in. As major projects were completed according to whatever timetable seems appropriate for your campaign, new ships would arrive with the production crew, and remove the builders and their tools for other projects. Such a world would most likely be short

on amenities for a long time. Employees could be motivated by high pay, or in darker universes, high debt.

This sort of beginning lends a completely different feel to a world. The earliest settlements would probably be the equivalent of factory towns, with shelters arranged close to the center of productivity. The first shelters may very well have been barracks, with private quarters going only to management and VIP's from off-world. Little emphasis would be placed on long-term survival needs. Warehouses would take the place of fields and farms. Imported equipment and tools would be the norm, instead of having the support structures to create them onsite. Architecture would tend to the bland, boxy structure early on. Someone who intends to move on soon rarely takes enough pride to design an aesthetically pleasing house.

This kind of colony will be a rarity in universes without FTL travel. Few human built corporations have the patience to invest in a project that will show profit in generations instead of years. The only exceptions to this rule would be if the commodity were especially valuable or rare, or if the world itself were the commodity. A terraforming company, for example, would be far more inclined to think in the long term. It would be a risky business, but if successful, the profit margins could be literally astronomical.

Pioneers would create an entirely different type of colony. These are people that have somehow been driven off their world. Perhaps it is religious persecution, or overcrowding. Perhaps it is merely a dream of something better, some worthy future that they fear they cannot find at home. First and foremost, these people would be motivated by survival. Their people would be picked for their skills. In better-funded ventures, many people might be cross-trained in many skills. If voyages are especially long, such training could be part of the voyage. Their initial supplies would concentrate on long-term needs instead of short-term production. Here would be found the farming equipment, the basic tools, and medical supplies. Pioneers would most likely bring along the beginnings of an infrastructure. Instead of prefab shelters and barracks, they would have carpentry or construction tools. Instead of faceless boxes with doors in them, pioneers would build homes, distinctive and personal. In such a colony, industry would appear as an afterthought, around the fringes of the earliest buildings. In the center would be some sort of community hall or focus. Perhaps the First Lander lays enshrined, or maybe there's a statue of the Founder.

The High Costs of Leaving Home. . .

The next question a GM needs to answer when creating a colony history is: Where did they get the money? Space travel is expensive enough if you travel alone. Shipping sufficient tools and supplies to set up a permanent station requires serious funding.

Profiteers will probably be sponsored and supported by a parent organization. Supply ships and cargo haulers will be frequent visitors and only the basics in life support and simple amenities need to be present. This will usually mean a leaner, less massive cargo on the first trip. Particularly unscrupulous corporations will send second rate or used equipment. As long as it gets production started, the next group of cargo ships can bring replacements in later. So what if it gets workers killed at first? The bottom line is larger, because overhead is reduced.

Of course, depending on the world and the company, a corporate colony may need extensive life support systems to allow production to take place. These sorts of ventures will usually be mining or processing operations, although research ventures are possible. Life support systems mean overhead, so whatever the operation was going after would probably be proportionately valuable.

The main drawback here is if for some reason supplies get cut off, the workers may be in for a rough time. With production as the primary concern, few allowances would probably be made for survival. If the workers are wholly, or even mostly dependent on the supply ships, it could become a grim situation indeed if those ships stopped coming. If the life support system is dependent on the ships, the workers are doomed, and the outpost will rapidly become a ghost town.

Pioneers would have completely different packing strategies, and therefore different costs. First and foremost there must be enough colonists to provide a stable gene pool, with a little padding to insure survival and account for attrition. That alone would increase the mass by a great deal. Then there would have to be enough food to sustain them

until they become self-sufficient, once again with a little padding. Depending on variables this could be anywhere from three months to a two years. Then there would be the matter of shelter. Depending on the circumstances, this does not have to consume too much mass. Tents would suffice on a naturally hospitable world. This kind of operation would probably be more expensive to assemble and move than a commercial venture, particularly because once landfall is achieved the colonists are on their own. Yet it may not have anywhere near as deep a set of pockets.

There are a couple of ways around this. First, the venture could be government sponsored. If this is the case, then why? A colony assembled as an act of desperation may not be as well equipped as one assembled carefully over time. There could be serious equipment shortages, or grim miscalculations in the food supplies. Even a well thought-out plan could suffer if funding is cut in midstream or if rampant bureaucracy nickel-and-dimes it to a shambles. If the colony is an exercise in public relations, then it should have all the supplies it needs to get started, and a large supply of donors to bolster the funding.

Another possibility is a self-funded group of dedicated settlers that give everything they have to a main colony fund, which provides at least the bulk of the money for the effort. This is the way many people came to the American west. The problem here is people who are independently wealthy usually don't go on colonizing jaunts. As a result, this sort of group may need some sort of additional funding, or may have to skimp on supplies. Again, knowing why the group left will add flavor to the colony.

Yet another avenue is a long-term loan made to a group by some institution. Perhaps a bank figures to make a name for itself by helping others settle the stars. Or perhaps they're looking to colonize those stars themselves without having to do all that messy working and surviving. All they have to do is foreclose at the right time and bingo. They have an instant colossal real estate holding. Of course, moving the colonists out might prove taxing, but with the possible gain, it might very easily be worth the risk.

It also always possible to mix and match. Perhaps the colony's founder is a profit minded corporation that is just opening for business. They have the vision and the plan, but the capital comes from a third party. Or perhaps the company shuts down, leaving the employees to their own devices. The transition period would greatly color history's perspective. Or perhaps the company makes its money by building the needed infrastructure for a stable, self-sufficient colony. The employees take the big risks, and the colonists move into a ready-made colony.

A Vision Of Stars

A third question that will greatly influence the nature of a colony is the philosophy of its founders. At first glance this question doesn't seem important to the profiteer colonist. Their central philosophy is to make money, isn't it? Well, yes, but there is more to consider than that. For example, did a unionized workforce found the colony? Then operating conditions will meet certain standards, and a high level of bureaucracy probably exists in the colonial structure. Workers concerned with their rights take great pains to see that those rights are honored. Was the founding company concerned solely with profit? In this case, certain expensive safeguards may have been overlooked, or the niceties of civilization would not have been part of the initial manifest. Colonists of such a world would probably be grim, hardworking people. Worse yet, perhaps the employees are working off high debts to the company, and are effectively unpaid labor. If you want, you can even drop the euphemism and just call them slaves. This creates a completely different dynamic, especially if there was some sort of rebellion.

Not all corporations are soulless employee mills. Some are very concerned for the health, welfare and happiness of their employees. In this case, the colony would begin well stocked with amenities. Or perhaps the founders believed that there is beauty in function and function in beauty. In such a corporate atmosphere wondrous paradises could be made.

In a pioneer style colony, the beliefs will be even more of an influence. The work ethic of the Puritans who first settled New England had a profound effect on the development of the region, long after the Puritans that earned it its name passed into history. Stoic perseverance and hard work are still the watchwords of many New England communities. As another example, the land rush and flood of humanity that surged into the American West left an indelible and decidedly different print on that region and the rest of the country as well. The independence of the settlers and frontier

style justice still make their presence known in many subtle and some not-so subtle ways.

"And Then What?"

Now comes the most important question yet discussed. What happened next? Answering this one can take as little as a few minutes, or a long as several years. The players may supply some of those details as they write their character's legends into the universe, especially if your campaign focuses on the beginning of a colony. Others the GM alone must come up with. If the colony began as a corporate venture, does it remain so? If so, why? What hurdles did the employees face? How did management deal with them? Is the supporting infrastructure corporate also, or did others move in to fill the made necessary by the corporation's bottom line? How have the two groups gotten along?

On pioneer worlds, did just one group claim the planet? If more than one did, how did the two (or more) groups co-exist? Did a single colony stay together, or was there a schism at some point? What was it? Was it a question of philosophy or survival? Did both groups survive? Did the planet itself somehow change or reveal things to the colony as time passed? Are there native sentients? How were they treated? Are the colonists even aware of them, or their sentient nature? Has there ever been a war?

These are but a few of the factors that can contribute to a colony's history. However, answering these questions will go a long way toward giving any world a bit of color and history. The rest is up to you, the GM.

by David Neuschulz

Introduction: A Different Approach

The World Wide Web is littered with "How to be a great GM/DM/StoryLord/Whatever" guides. Almost universally, the approach these primers take is to offer corrective measures via altering the game mechanics or plot. They will suggest a plot device, or a rules variant that will punish/coerce the problematic player (or alleviate the problematic situation). I don't mean to completely dismiss the guides; much of what they offer is helpful, especially to the beginning GM. Nor do I mean to denigrate the spinning of yarns; fleshing out a list of do's and don'ts with anecdotal examples is a time honored tradition, and more to the point: gaming stories are just plain fun to read. But I have to confess that the redundancy of the information has led me to propose an alternate (not better) set of guidelines.

The guide I am about to put forth comes from taking a step back from gaming and examining our hobby from a more objective viewpoint. . . and applying the guidelines of "Role Play Therapy" (formally "Psychodrama Groups") to the task of GMing. A few years back, I came to the conclusion that this branch of Group Psychology had much to offer an aspiring GM. How and why I came to this conclusion is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that RPGs are, in some ways, merely Role Play Therapy turned inside-out: one's purpose (psychological awareness and improved social skills) is the other one's fringe benefit (entertainment), and vice-versa. Another way to put it is that running a small group that role-plays, whether for psychological benefit or for pure entertainment, is a task which requires insight into the science of Group Dynamics.

With that in mind, I consulted a venerable tome entitled *Group Counseling, Strategies & Skills (3rd ed.)* (Jacobs, Masson & Harvill), the equivalent of a "DM's Guide" for group therapy leaders. Then I engaged in a "compare and contrast" exercise to see what might be applicable to gaming, and what would not. What follows is the result of that exercise.

Part One: Being a Great GM, Administratively

The nuts and bolts of running group, any group, are often overlooked in your typical GM Guide in favor of the nuts and bolts of fictional worldbuilding. Again, this is no surprise: reading worldbuilding systems is fun (at least for some people). Yet you can have the entire universe of Middle Earth at your fingertips, and still ruin the game if you can't manage it. Jacobs, Masson & Harvill identify 16 forces that act upon groups. The authors assert that the sum of these forces predicts success or failure for the group. Here is how they may or may not apply to RPGs:

1. **Clarity of purpose for both the leader and the members.** For a GM, this might seem to be a non-issue: the purpose is clearly entertainment. Yet, entertainment is a pretty generic term. Have you actually discussed with your players what kind of experience they want? Maybe somebody grooves on Monte Hall. Others may prefer romantic melodrama.
2. **Relevance of purpose for the members.** If six people want an epic campaign and a seventh wants to subscribe to the "Genre of The Month Club," maybe it's unfair to everyone involved to try and squeeze the seventh player

in.

3. **Group size.** Numerous clinical studies have pegged the optimum size for group therapy at 5 to 8 with outer limits of 2 to 12. These numbers are directly applicable to gaming, as anyone who has ever tried to GM a game of over 8 people can attest to.
4. **Length of each session.** For therapy groups the time frame is 2 to 3 hours maximum. Here at last, we have a difference! As a GM, 3 hours is a good *minimum*. And while it is true that anything beyond 6 is a marathon, those of us who have known the joy of "dice rolls at dawn" shrug such epic play off as par for the course.
5. **Frequency of meetings.** Once a week to once a month depending on the type of therapy group. This holds true for RPGs also. A rule of thumb: if "getting in gear" for each session lasts longer than 15 minutes, the meetings are probably too far apart. Alas, sometimes it simply isn't practical or possible to meet more often.
6. **Adequacy of the setting.** Among the common sense things mentioned in the group leadership manuals (like lighting and temperature), there are a couple of interesting tidbits. Chairs should not be lounge chairs: too comfy. Also they should be all the same height (excepting the GM, of course). A circular table is the best. . . and one should be cognizant of grossly oversized tables relative to the number of players: physical distance = emotional distance. My note: overcrowding can be equally toxic.
7. **Time of day.** Avoid the after lunch slump. This is seldom a problem for the mostly nocturnal RPGer, but worth a mention.
8. **The leader's attitude (toward leading).** The point is an obvious one: if the group leader doesn't really want to be leading the group, the group itself will be negatively impacted. Therapists may be assigned by their clinic or professors to lead groups that they do not want to. Since gaming is a hobby, it is rare to meet a truly averse GM. (Occasionally somebody gets drafted to GM at the last minute during a gaming convention. . .)
9. **Closed or open groups.** A critical decision for the group leader. A closed group will evolve into a more intense group provided enough members remain through the initial shakeout. At the other end of the spectrum, in a very mature (long-lived) group things may go stale, at which point the introduction of new members may be beneficial. The overriding point here is that the group leader must formulate and articulate a clear policy on new members.
10. **Voluntary or non-voluntary membership.** Prison therapy groups face this problem. As far as I know, RPG group membership is voluntary. Even in prison.
11. **Members' level of goodwill.** It is easier to lead a group of cooperative members than uncooperative ones. Again, obvious, but included here for completeness.
12. **Members' level of commitment.** This addresses that ingtagible glue that holds the group together through the inter-adventure doldrums. Don't wait, be pro-active: as soon as you spot half-hearted participants, approach them. Discuss their interest level issues openly and search for a way to engage them more fully in the game.
13. **Level of trust among members.** Trust is key to therapy, but. . . since RPGs aren't therapy, sometimes it adds an interesting dynamic if one or more players are distrustful of others. Did someone say "Thief?" (Of course, we are talking about minor levels of distrust. Major levels are intolerable. In one instance that I know of, deep distrust of one female player towards a relentless, sexually threatening male quite quickly disintegrated the group itself. This extreme example is a case where a restraining order would have been more useful than GM admonition.)
14. **Members' attitude toward the leader.** It is rare to find an entire group that hates the GM, but it is common to have one or two members that are hostile or lack respect. The GM is as likely as any therapist to endure the wrath of someone who has issues with authority figures.
15. **The leader's attitude toward the members.** Do you really like the players, or are they the only ones you could dig up on a Tuesday night? Either way, know that it will affect the group, unspoken or not.
16. **The leader's experience and readiness to deal with groups.** Again, an obvious point. RPG Experience Points model real world phenomena: greater experience equates to greater expertise.

In sum: when assembling a new therapy group, pre-interviews or questionnaires are routinely used as a tool to ensure the group has at least some of the 16 forces working in its favor. Sometimes the GM wishes to exclude certain individuals based on their expectations, and just as often, the GM is flexible enough to cater to those expectations. Either way, don't feel embarrassed to hand out (or e-mail) a pre-acceptance questionnaire.

Besides the 16 forces, Jacobs, Masson & Harvill present an additional technique that is usefully transplanted from role play therapy into GMing: "Session Planning." Plan three distinct phases, beginning / middle / end. The beginning phase

should be recap of prior events (as much to set the mood as to refresh the memory). The Middle Phase is where the game runs along. The Ending Phase is a crucial denouement/decompression, allowing a mental and emotional transition back to our non-group lives.

All too often this final phase is considered merely to be the point where the GM distributes experience points and the pizza boxes are thrown in the corner (all the more abrupt if the adventure is suspended mid-way and no experience points are forthcoming). However, clinical studies have proven that a few minutes of recap at the end of the session reinforces "the work done," and this in turn contributes significantly to the longevity of the group. In the case of gaming, the work done equates to the entertainment experience. . . not unlike talking about a great movie just after you've come out of the theater. For a GM, this is the best time to let the silliness run wild; it helps everyone transition back to reality (and prevents embarrassing things like rolling dice to decide whether you're taking Rte. 35 or back roads to get home).

Lastly, and this is a good example of formalized "common sense," the group therapy leader must try to estimate in advance how much material or "emotional ground" he's going to try and cover in the session. This is roughly equivalent to a GM planning how much of the plot will be completed in a session. And to be fair to the GM guides out there, this is a topic that is covered. (In brief, trying to force too much into a night can diffuse the drama, yet too little and you face a pack of yawning sloths. . . and yet again, the GM has to be flexible when the plot takes a twist and the intended pacing for the evening is thrown out of whack.) But here's a corollary that often goes unmentioned: a diligent role play therapy leader keeps track of his/her own tendency to overplan/underplan a session and makes changes accordingly. A GM should do this also. Diligently. Self-monitoring is a serious prerequisite for a GM who aspires to greatness.

Part Two: Take Being a Great GM *Inter*personally

Here we get into the heart of the matter. Having facility with group leadership can be learned. All that's required is mastery of a certain set of basic skills. Each of the following skills, taken from various primers on role play therapy group leadership, can been adapted for RPGs.

1. **Active Listening.** Also known as "scanning," this means paying attention not only to content, but the vocal quality and body language of the speaker. And not just the speaker. A skilled GM is constantly scanning the group. Sometimes the non-verbal reaction of one player to another's statement is more important than the statement itself. This skill is doubly difficult for a GM as opposed to a group therapy leader because the distinction has to constantly be made between roleplayed emotions and real ones. This skill is the key to understanding the subtextual chemistry of your group.
2. **Use of eyes.** There are four ways in which to use your eyes:
   a. To scan for non-verbal cues (see above).
   b. To get members to look at other members. By not always directly engaging the speaker's gaze, he/she will naturally begin to look at fellow players.
   c. To draw out members. A particular shy or reticent member may be prompted by kind and encouraging eye contact. Another method is to make eye contact several times with this player while addressing the group as a whole.
   d. To cut off members. Often there will be a player who tends to speak first when any question is posed to the group. By looking at this person while the question is being asked, but then shifting your gaze around the table, and ending your question totally out of eye contact with the problematic individual, you are prompting other players to speak up. This does not work all the time, but can be effective.
3. **Use of Voice.** The GMs voice sets the tone for the session, and if its the first session, the whole group. It also can be used to pace the group. And finally, it can energize the group because often the group derives its energy level from the leader.
4. **Identifying allies.** It is important early on for a GM to identify players that will be cooperative and helpful. Often a GM will need to rely on their goodwill to steer the plot in a desired direction. They gladly tend to play NPCs and may even put their own precious characters in danger if they sense that this somehow furthers the GMs plans. Allies are also useful in bringing any number of difficult player types under control.

And this brings us to the last part of the interpersonal skills section: dealing with problem situations. I have put this last because it is precisely the content of most of the online GM Guides, and my solutions to these common problems rely heavily on an understanding of the prior discussion.

1. *The Chronic Talker.* Sometimes someone is flooding the room with non-game related banter. While a certain amount of this is necessary and enjoyable, if it begins to annoy others or hinder play, then it's time to step in. This is a case where role play therapy and gaming are diametrically opposed: in gaming, you don't want players to use the group as a therapy session to solve personal problems -- people have come to play. In any case, there are two ways to handle this. First, you might address the group as a whole and lecture about non-game related talking and hope the offender gets the gist of it. Second, you can invite the chatty gamer to a one-on-one session for some "special" character development and talk with him/her then. Generally try to avoid embarrassing the individual right off. If your requests are ignored, then public embarrassment might serve as a last ditch effort prior to expulsion.

2. *The Dominator.* This person differs from the Chronic Talker in that they really want to usurp your authority. If you have a self-appointed vice-DM, it's best to skip the general address to the group about over-controlling behavior, and go right for the one-on-one. If you are willing to convert a player into an assistant GM (a great asset and an underrated talent), go for it. Otherwise, be firm. Your way or the highway.

3. *The Distractor.* This is a rare instance where a problem common in role play therapy is uncommon in RPGs. Usually this person is desperately trying to avoid the self-examination required in therapy by changing the focus to lighter topics. Gamers, on the other hand, are desperately trying to avoid a hoard of rampaging Trolls.

4. *The Rescuer.* Again, this person in the context of therapy, tries to smooth over negative feelings and conflict within the group. In fact, in the event two of your players end up heading towards a real life fistfight, a rescuer is handy to have around.

5. *The Negative Member.* A sour apple spoils the cider, as they say. If someone is constantly complaining or disagreeing about the how the group is being run, even the most exciting game can suddenly go flat. Sometimes, this behavior is really a masked desire for GM attention. Try a one-on-one enlisting the player's help. This can be administrative (set up chairs, break down and clean up the table) or game related ("I'm trying to get the party to go into the mountains, can you role play a sudden desire to visit your dwarven home in the high-peaks?") If this doesn't work, identify those individuals who are your most positive players. During the game, direct most of your questions to them. Avoid eye contact with the party-pooper so as not to elicit more negativity.

6. *The Resistant Member.* This applies to prison groups, or AA members consigned to groups by a judge or detox program. I've never heard of a judge sentencing someone to twenty hours of ***Call of Cthulu*** before, although if I were behind the bench, anti-roleplaying religous zealots might get just that.

7. *The Member who tries to "get to the leader."* This is perhaps the most difficult challenge to surmount in all of GMing. There are two main reasons why one or more participants in a group will suddenly try to sabotage the GMs efforts.

   The first and most commonly thought of cause is that one or more players have issues with "authority." Like it or not, leadership -- even of a small gaming group -- can evoke strong reactions from people who have such issues. "getting to the leader" is characterized by malicious intent and verbal ambush and is much more severe than "the Dominator" (above). If you are verbally attacked with questions (not pertaining to the game but pertaining to the way it is being run), try to explain your methods and motives without anger. Take focus away from the power struggle between you and the attacker. If you feel you can discuss and compromise on certain administrative issues, do so. Only if the problem persists and you feel that it's an "authority problem" should you deal with the saboteur(s) with dispatch. Advise them of their option to pack up and go home. If it continues, curtly show them the door.

   However, if the parallel between clinical group leadership and GMing holds true here, numerous studies have revealed that the most likely cause of "get to the leader" syndrome is a lack of leadership skills. Understandably, it is difficult to be objective about yourself, yet as a GM you should be aware that certain clumsy/insensitive methods can often irritate and frustrate players -- putting them into a mood to sink your ship. Some typical behaviors that result in this situation are:

      a. Putting players on the spot in front of other players

    b. Cutting off players inappropriately
    c. Failing to notice a player who wants to speak
    d. Allowing a player to be picked on by other players
    e. Not being skilled enough in general to control the group
    f. Being oblivious to player boredom

While the self-examination required of therapy patients is not necessary for gamers, it is necessary for the GM, or at least a GM who strives to better his leadership skills.

    a. *Dealing with silence.* There are two kinds of silence in groups, productive and nonproductive. When people are internally processing something that was said or done in the group, that's productive silence. If you've just tossed "The Riddle of the Seven Serpents" onto the table and everyone is mute -- this is a good thing. Nonproductive silence is a product of confusion or worse: boredom. Be sensitive to silence, but don't feel compelled to break it; analyze it first.

    b. *Dealing with sexual feelings.* This is a real problem in therapy where, theoretically, the purpose of the group, from an individual's standpoint (better mental health, resolution of nagging psycho/social issues), should supercede the base desire to copulate. In gaming, this is a non-issue: few GMs would argue that they expect their players to put a higher priority on their epic campaign than a sexual relationship. (They might *hope* that their campaign is that enthralling, but I doubt they *expect* that is so.)

    c. *Dealing with crying.* Again, in gaming, this is not a likely skill needed for a group leader. (And even Patton blew it on this one.)

    d. *Dealing with mutually hostile members.* If two people are not getting along to the point of impacting the game, meet with them, either individually or together, off hours. Try to get the players to agree to work toward a less disruptive relationship. Don't ambush the players with this agenda; give them time to think it over before the next game, otherwise the session itself might be used as a battleground. . . and not on the hex map! (It should be noted that several texts assert that the most intense, cohesive and long-lived groups are ones which had initial personal animosities, and which then worked through them.)

    e. *Asking a member to leave.* Like it or not, this is the ultimate recourse for all personality problems. The one guideline here is to try to make the request at the end of a gaming session or off hours. . . partially to avoid further disrupting the game, and partially to prevent a power struggle from erupting in front of other players.

    f. *Dealing with prejudiced or insensitive members.* This is a really difficult problem to broach. Political correctness aside, you should not let a gaming session ever devolve into a situation where players are judging other players. Verbal intervention is required. Keep the focus on the game. If the abuse is severe, take a meeting with the individual to point out the detrimental behavior. As always, the last recourse is a dismissal.

An Afterword

It may be argued that these disciplines are far more predilected by inborn talent, and as such are much harder to confer upon the aspiring GM by way of mere word. However, the administrative component of GMing as well as the psychosocial management of small groups *is* learnable. I hope that this alternative GM guide has at least given you food for thought.

See you at the tables!

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Pyramid Review

Jovian Chronicles: Ships of the Fleet, Vol. 4 -- Venus Fleet

Published by [Dream Pod 9](#)

Written by Wunji Lau (Writer/Designer and Lloyd Doug Jessee (Game Stats/Design)

144 pages, $20.95

Being truly excellent is a double-edged sword: On the one hand, of course, you're excellent -- and that comes with a lot of perks. On the other hand, though, you have set yourself a very high standard indeed -- and a failure in the details suddenly becomes a notable offense.

Which is why I'm going to take a few moments to dwell on the failures of *Ships of the Fleet, Vol. 4* -- a supplement describing six Venusian ships of the *Jovian Chronicles* line, the principles of Venusian ship design, and Venusian fleet operations. Although these failures may all be in the details, they are no less disappointing.

Why are they disappointing? Because Dream Pod 9 has excelled -- with all three of their games -- in providing a level of depth, breadth, and quality for their fictional worlds that almost beggars the imagination. When, for example, you not only know the broad strokes of political machination and warmongering in the solar system of the 21st century, but also what the favorite books of the Jovian Confederation are, and how the details of shipboard life onboard a Constantinople differ from those of an Birmingham -- and all of this weaves together into a consummate and seamless whole -- you've achieved something special.

You can build mighty worlds out of imaginative wonders, but the final key to the imagination lies in the details. It is there that a world will cease to be merely words on a page and, instead, become a living, breathing presence in your mind's eye.

So, when you've accomplished the extraordinary task of making this happen -- of bringing a world to life -- it behooves you to make sure that those details continue to be consistent and believable.

Which brings us back to what makes this book disappointing.

For example, on page eight we are told that all Venusian ships are specifically made to look different from one another -- part of a fleet-wide doctrine to camouflage their navy as civilian merchant vessels and thus hide it from the other solar powers. So why on page thirteen are we told that "these newer ships are cosmetically indistinguishable from the older ones?" And why, whenever we are shown pictures of multiple ships, these are merely cut-and-paste copies of one another (an offense made all the more notable by the fact that even the name stamped on the side of the ship has not been changed from one carbon copy to another)? And speaking of that all-too-obvious name: If you're attempting to keep the size of your navy a secret, is it really a good idea to be printing "CVNA" (Cooperative Venusian Naval Administration) in large letters for the entire solar system to see on every single ship in your navy?

There are other examples of carelessness, as well: In the core *Jovian Chronicles* rulebook we were told that Venus deliberately exported only algae products and foodstuffs in order to conceal from the rest of the solar system the extent of their technical knowledge. So why is it that in this book we are told that Venusian ships are at a particular risk from pirate attacks because their ships are almost "guaranteed" to be carrying items of value? Once of the nicer elements in

the book are the crew interviews -- allowing you to hear first-person narratives of why shipboard life is like. . . but many of these interviews do not sound like Venusians, coming across as angry and egotistical rather than reserved and polite.

And so forth. There are many companies out there -- companies which turn out *good* games -- who could do these same things, and I just wouldn't care. I probably wouldn't even notice. But the Dream Pod 9 have established a record of high quality, and I notice things in their books that I wouldn't notice if I didn't care so much.

Now that I'm done nitpicking the book to death, though, let's dwell on its pleasant -- and substantial -- successes:

For starters, if you're running a roleplaying campaign set onboard a Venusian ship, you should seriously consider picking up this book. The detailed ship information, interviews with crew members describing ship life, the coverage of crew structures for each type of ship, along with descriptions of shipboard procedures and naval structure are all great, hands-on material which will have immediate applicability for you.

For tactical players the most obvious application of the material in this book comes in the form of ship stats -- giving you some new toys to play with. But I think that most of you will also find the information regarding Venusian deployment philosophy and tactical planning during wartime to be fascinating and useful material (although I wish there was as much detail provided for Venus as was provided for the Jovian Confederation in previous volumes).

The only problem the *Ships of the Fleet* books have, as a concept, is that they lack a clearly defined role for either roleplayers or tactical players. The inclusion of shipboard life and procedures makes the books potentially useful for roleplayers -- but only roleplayers in campaigns with substantial time aboard ship. On the other hand, the inclusion of this material reduces the number of ships which can be covered -- making the book less inclusively useful for the tactical player. Both roleplayer and tactical player receive a number of tools in these books -- but it is an open question in my mind whether or not they receive enough tools to justify the price tag.

Therefore, this books comes with a reserved recommendation: If you're a *Jovian Chronicles* fanatic, definitely pick it up. Otherwise, you're only going to want this one if it has a very specific application to your campaign.

-- Justin Bacon

Once And Future Kings: Alternate Arthurs

"Yet some men say in many parts of England that King Arthur is not dead, but had by the will of Our Lord Jesu into another place; and men say that he shall come again, and that he shall win the holy cross."
-- Sir Thomas Malory, *Le Morte d'Arthur*, XXI:7

In the time of England's greatest peril, men say, her greatest King shall return to lead them to glory. Fiction (and gaming) can't wait that long: Tim Powers reincarnated him in *The Drawing of the Dark*, C.S. Lewis implied his influence in *That Hideous Strength*, and Mike W. Barr and Brian Bolland sent him into space in *Camelot 3000*. But the Matter of Britain fills a capacious library, becoming a bottomless cauldron of stories and possibilities to combine our noblest myths anew. Herewith, then, four more idyll speculations tuned for gaming potential from fantasy to horror to metaphor to heroic rebirth. Listen for the trumpets; hearken to the hoofbeats; behold with gladsome heart the Return of the King.

"A thousand hearts are great within my bosom:
Advance our standards, set upon our foes;
Our ancient word of courage, fair Saint George,
Inspire us with the spleen of fiery dragons!"
-- William Shakespeare, *King Richard III*, V:iii:348-351

On a rainy August day in 1485 on Bosworth Field, the Stanleys had turned traitor, Northumberland refused to move. The last Plantagenet, Richard III, overcome by Henry Tudor's hired French mercenaries, uttered "the ancient word of courage," offering his kingdom for a dragon. And Arthur, the once and future King, restored to youth and resplendent in his armor, rode onto the field beneath the True Dragon Banner, rallied Northumberland's men, and smashed the pretender's invasion. With his dying breath, Richard (who had no legal heir) returned the crown of England to Arthur. After pacifying Scotland, Arthur built up his kingdom, binding the wounds of the long War of the Roses. He offered employment to one Christopher Columbus, who offered to sail west in search of Avalon, and was unsurprised when the navigator reported that it was a land of wonder and magic. Upon Charles VIII's death, Arthur invaded France to press the claims of England to its crown. In single combat, he defeated Louis of Orléans' champion, the Chevalier de Bayard; Bayard joined the new Round Table after Arthur's coronation in Rheims. In 1501 he married Katherine of Aragon, and upon her father Ferdinand's death in 1516 he ascended to the throne of Spain as well. By then, he felt strong enough to retake the Holy Land from the Saracens -- taking advantage of the defeat of the Mameluke sultan by the Turks, he siezed Egypt and took Jerusalem from the south, fighting the Sultan to a standstill. By dint of this glorious victory, the electors proclaimed Arthur the Holy Roman Emperor in 1519.

In this campaign frame, the PCs are Knights of Arthur's new Round Table, seeking adventure most commonly in the treacherous East or the mysterious West. Suleiman's magicians and enchanters summon djinn and pay Assassins to oppose the defenders of the Holy Land; this is a twilight **GURPS Arabian Nights** (or "Arabian Knights") setting of intrigue in the bazaars of Cairo, quests for the eldritch City of Sarras, and swordfights on flying carpets high over the Syrian desert. In the new continent of Avalon, the banner of the Dragon now flies over the pyramids of Tenochtitlan, after the fall of the bloody rulers there. However, the new lands are full of monsters and magic from the deserts of New Spain to the great forests of New England. This setting offers high fantasy in the *Faerie Queene* mold, either of conventional stripe (gryphons, Amazons, etc.) or more American legendry (thunderbirds, hairy giants, grey fairies from the skies). Either way, there's nothing that a knightly sword-arm (and perhaps a serjeant's harquebus) can't defeat for Arthur and for England.

"The Cross is not a passive agent. It protects the pure of heart, and it has often appeared in the air above our sabbats, confusing and dispersing the powers of darkness."
-- note from the John Dee translation of the *Necronomicon*, as cited in "The Space-Eaters," by Frank Belknap Long

It was certain. By the light of a flickering taper, in the upper tower of the Imperial castle in Prague, John Dee read the blasphemous predictions of the Mad Arab -- the stars would come right and spell disaster for England in 1588, less than four years away. Worse yet, Dee's informants had told him that powerful nobles of the Spanish court actively

conspired with malign entities from outside space and time. Putting aside his evocations of angels, Dee had his agents break into a certain tomb near Glastonbury and bring him the "essential saltes" within. Thus did Arthur return to defend England in secret, his Round Table composed of mercenaries, alchemists, footpads, scholars, and priests from every corner of Europe, sworn only to oppose the Great Old Ones and to protect humanity (and England) from their timeless evil.

This, then, is a *GURPS Swashbucklers-Special Ops* campaign, an Elizabethan-era *Delta Green*. The PCs are part of Dee's secret Round Table; as the undead Arthur mounts to other planes in fey communion (or combat) with elder beings, they serve as his hands and eyes from Transylvania to Loch Ness. The PCs might track rumored manuscripts through the London booksellers' underground with Christopher Marlowe, or loot golden idols from Spanish treasure-cities with Sir Francis Drake, with every success bringing new questions in its wake. Are certain galleons trying to communicate with the Deep Ones off Hispaniola? Have the Mi-Go been escorting messengers over the Alps in exchange for rare minerals from the Inca mines? Do defrocked Jesuits offer blood sacrifice to Dark Young beneath the Paris catacombs? The Round Table will find the truth, no matter the cost.

"It is certain that I cannot show in any words the utter peace of that Welsh coast to which I came; one sees, I think, in such a change a figure of the passage from the disquiets and the fears of earth to the peace of paradise."
-- Arthur Machen, "The Great Return"

On August 24, 1940, a lone German bomber, off course from a run on Plymouth, unloaded its stick of high explosives onto Glastonbury Tor, ripping open the hill in which King Arthur slumbered, and spilling the light of the Grail over Britain. Arthur emerged, his wounds healed from his long sleep, bringing the Grail with him. British crops gave tenfold, British wounded heroes recovered, British cities refused to burn. The isle of Albion was once more whole and inviolate, a Grail Kingdom. Hitler's response was full-scale retreat into his nascent occultist mania. Every whim of Himmler's suddenly became a national priority; entire departments came under Ahnenerbe control in a quest for the Dark Grail. Driven by his implacable, psychotic will, Hitler's faith was rewarded by the black powers he finally fully believed in. On October 31, 1940, twelve SS officers drank from the Dark Grail at the Dolorous Castle of Wewelsburg, and transformed into horrific bat-winged monstrosities of vast sorcerous power. Each nosferatu summoned hordes of lesser demons: Dero from subterranean caverns, seductive unseelie made from mandrakes, robots built from gleaming bronze and human flesh in Mengele's death-camps, all the monsters of Weimar given form and fell purpose. Now the pure paladins of Arthur's Grail Court must do battle with the blackest spawn of modern nightmare, on a quest to find and destroy the Dark Grail in the center of the new Waste Land before Walpurgisnacht, 1941 -- when Himmler plans to transform the entire SS into an unstoppable army of the damned.

This game is high-powered fantasy-horror *GURPS Undead*. The PCs are Arthurian Grail Knights, the finest men of England's finest hour. The opposition is everything hateful that ever belched from a smokestack; everything repulsive that ever sublimated modern nightmare; everything that exists to send the Grail back to oblivion and leave mankind hopelessly under the jack-boot.

"Now they'd come so far and they'd waited so long
Just to end up caught in a dream where everything goes wrong
Where the dark of the night holds back the light of the day
And you've gotta stand and fight for the price you pay."
-- Bruce Springsteen, "The Price You Pay"

In 2036, Great Britain collapsed. The Grain Blight had hit this traditionally food-importing nation hard, and the running sore of Northern Ireland only accelerated Britain's drift into dictatorship. A panicky government strangled a brief bubble of prosperity built on auto exports for the overseas duelling circuit. A number of the cars vanished between factory and docks, and the police sought refuge in brutality to mask their inability to deal with a desperate populace. The Revolution drove the doddering King Charles III into Canadian exile, but the new Republic failed to keep even the tyrannical order of its predecessor. When terrorists from the irredentist Royalist Ulster Command torched the North Sea oilfields, the Republic disintegrated under a wave of looting and panic. Local war-lords became local gang-lords, seldom capable of ruling even a county without falling to internecine squabbles. French troops landed in Britain to sieze its nuclear missiles, but refused to block the waves of German anarchists and raiders

swarming ashore in search of loot and destruction. For underground autoduelists Art Penn and Gwen Stagg, and their best mate Lance Lake, there's only one thing to do -- load their maxims, start their engines, and don't stop until England is free.

This is an (alternate) **GURPS Autoduel** campaign, and although you can play it for mysticism, it might work best solely as a straight retelling of heroic combat for civilization and order against barbarism and hatred. (If you're less concerned about Arthurian purity, you can restore some Autoduel purity by moving the campaign to America in 2016 or in an even blacker February of 2045.) From low-powered *Magnificent Seven*-style combats against cycle scum to grand themes of passion and betrayal, any aspect of the Arthurian myth fits the **Autoduel** universe of automotive jousting and operatic anarchy. Put your pedal to the metal, and slam it into fifth gear for England, and for the future Once and Future King.

Pyramid Pick

Tenchi Muyo! RPG and Resource Book

Published by [Guardians of Order]

Written by David Pulver and Karen A. McLarney

208 pages, $29.95 US ($39.95 CAN)

Let me preface this review with a disclaimer: I was a playtester for *Tenchi Muyo!* and am a fan of the series. I playtest many things. I am a fan of many things. Please don't let this disturb you.

* * *

While not very succinct, the title -- *Tenchi Muyo! RPG and Resource Book* -- is quite descriptive. Broken into sections we have:

- *Tenchi Muyo!* **(exclamation point mandatory):** A popular series of OAVs, movies and two different television shows in Japan. This book covers the events of the OAVs (which are easily available to most fans and are being shown in a slightly edited form on Cartoon Network.) Why not cover all the "Tenchi Muyo" universe in one book? Despite mostly having the same characters, the storylines of the various venues are sufficiently dissimilar that they are basically different stories (and have different licenses). Guardians of Order promises future supplements to remedy this situation for those who prefer a different flavor of Tenchi.
- *RPG:* Based on the Tri-Stat system (first published in *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*), *TM!RPGaRB* is a complete RPG. You don't have to buy anything else to dive into the game. This may cause some grumbling from those who don't want to buy multiple versions of the same game mechanics, but for licenses such as this it makes perfect sense. Drawing in fans of the series and turning them into roleplayers has made GOO's other licenses (most notably the amazingly-popular *Sailor Moon RPG* line of products) a force to broaden the roleplaying community. It's hard to argue when the "one book is all you need" strategy has worked so well.
- *Resource Book:* True to its name, there's a lot of information on the series here. A complete episode guide, a bit of the history behind the OAVs, an essay on the "Exotic Girlfriend" sub-genre of anime, cast and production credits (both for the original Japanese releases and the dubbed American ones), and even the english lyrics for the series. Of course, every major and minor character gets an entry plus sections for the various ships, locations and institutions (such as the Galaxy Police). It's obvious that the authors watched the videos many, many times and that the book will be useful to fans of the series even if they never decide to play the game.

The book is, frankly, gorgeous. 208 full-color pages with many, many pictures from the series liberally applied throughout. The layout is clear and very easy on the eyes. Jeff Mackintosh (the layout and art director) pulled out all the stops to make this the prettiest GOO product that I've seen to date. My only nitpick is that the title character only gets four square inches of space on the cover . . . the back cover. Then again, fans of the series will find Ryoko easily recognizable, and those unfamiliar with the show will probably find her face more of a draw than the rather plain Tenchi Masaki!

For those of you unfamilar with the series, Tenchi was apparently just an average boy who happened to free a "demon" from a cave near his house who turned out to be a space pirate that had been trapped for seven-hundred years. (Believe me, this isn't even remotely weird considering some shows out there.) Ryoko and the rest of the cast show up, directly or indirectly, because of her presence. Among them is Princess Ayeka (who is hunting for Ryoko); Ayeka's sister, Sasami; the clutzy Galaxy Police Detective Mihoshi; Ryoko's 20,000 year old mother and super-scientist,

Washu; and, of course, an immense space battleship that can turn into two-pound cat-rabbit (also know as a cabbit). Okay, maybe this is a little weird. They all end up living at the Masaki household with Tenchi. Fortunately, Tenchi's grandfather has a big house!

The main story revolves around Ayeka and Ryoko, who both vie for Tenchi's affections, and Tenchi's discovery of his true heritage. Eventually, the entire crew ventures into space as various aliens come to annoy/kidnap/defeat members of the household. With just a bit of creativity, a lot of stories could be created both on Earth and beyond given the detailed information presented.

All main characters and almost all minor ones have a write-up, usually with full game stats. The various ships, robots and other bits of equipment likewise have complete write-ups as well. This completeness makes a gamemaster's job much easier when designing new characters and equipment. The authors don't extend beyond this much except for the sample adventure and weapon lists, but that's a reasonable compromise considering how much detail is included.

The rules for *Tenchi Muyo!* are based on the Tri-Stat system which is common to Guardian of Order's (current) anime role-playing releases. Light, easily-grasped and flexible, it makes a perfect foundation for the numerous licenses that GOO has acquired. Notice I said "based on the Tri-Stat system." One of the advantages of including all the game rules in each new release is that you are not bound by the designs (or mistakes) of the past. The core system is still there, but there have been major additions. Pulver's mecha creation system from *Big Robots, Cool Starships*, the skill system first seen in *Dominion Tank Police* and *Hot Rods and Gun Bunnies*, and numerous minor and major fixes have all been included. For those *BESM* fans out there, you can view this book as a preview of the upcoming *Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd edition*. Keep in mind, though, that the *Tenchi Muyo!* rules are designed for a specific universe and won't be as generic or complete as the 2nd edition.

Characters are easy to generate, even for newcomers. You spend Character Points on the three statistics (Body, Mind, Soul) and various Attributes (which can range from the rather campy Art of Distraction to the awesome Jurai Power) which usually come in six levels. Certain Attributes (Own a Big Mecha, Mass Power, Jurai Power) give you a pool of points to buy certain special powers (Sub-Attributes) using basically the same system. For example, any random character won't have Telekinesis, but those of the Jurai royal house can buy it. After spending the Character Points (including any from taking optional Character Defects), Skills are bought using the same level/point system using a pool of Skill Points.

Using the system is equally simple: roll 2d6, apply modifiers and compare to the appropriate Stat (or, occasionally, another value.) Yeah, the details get a bit more complex than that, but the basic mechanic really is that easy.

If you are a fan of the series and want a convenient reference guide, or want to play in the *Tenchi Muyo!* universe, this book is a must-have. Even if you don't fall into either of those categories, the universe is fun enough, and the rules good enough, that you could easily run a campaign with what is presented.

-- John Karakash

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

A Moving Column

Well, as I mentioned last week, I have moved. So as you read this I am either cuddled in my new home, drinking a can of Coke, or out on the streets, collecting cans to trade for a bottle of Thunderbird. Regardless, I'm surrounded by boxes.

So I'm not talking about much this week other than moving. But I'll tie it to gaming; honest.

I'd like to point out that, between myself and my circle of four friends here in town, there has been a total of twelve moves over the past five years. Within the past few years, my workplace has moved, three of my friends' workplaces have moved, and two sets of parents have moved. My Friendly Local Game Store, my grocery store, our local courthouse, and many others have all moved. Yet it's something I seldom see happen in the realm of television, movies, or roleplaying games.

Here, then, are some plot hooks involving moving.

- An Evil Corporation has outgrown its headquarters (or its previous headquarters are uninhabitable for some reason). This idea has many possibilities. Perhaps the PCs are trying to enter the organized chaos of a move in order to retrieve company secrets. Perhaps they need to figure out a way to put insecurity features (secret tunnels, bugging devices) into the new location without EvilCorp knowing. Perhaps they need to try to figure out *where* EvilCorp is moving to, since they're being incredibly secretive, before Something Bad happens.
- During a routine move, something unusual is found in the back of a closet. Whether it's a [Warehouse 23](#) item, a pirate treasure map, or the return correspondence of the Corinthians, the act of moving is a great way to have something new spring up.
- A Dependant, Ally, Patron, or some other important NPC moves without telling the players. (This is especially appropriate for addle-brained or mad scientist-type.)
- A move can be a wonderful way for a campaign to take a new twist or turn. For example, the PCs may have caught the public's imagination as pulp crime fighters in Chicago, and are offered lucrative Hollywood deals if they will move to California. . . a deal that will also be offered to whatever charity the PCs most support/believe in. (Incidentally, this is also a good way to keep from having to [blow up the world](#).)
- The PCs try to move into a new headquarters or office, and everything that can possibly go wrong does. Phone service is not transferred as expected; the 15-foot truck the truck rental place was *supposed* to have available isn't. . . but they have a six-foot cargo van or an 80-foot tractor trailer available; electric bills are sent to Bobo Grubbs of Des Moines (who feeds them to his cocker spaniel), resulting in the power being turned off; and so on. Who's behind these dastardly deeds? Or is this simply the cosmic whims of some divine grandmaster. . . a supreme Game Master, if you will. . . who delights in tormenting the PCs?
- Due to public outcry, the headquarters (or city!) the heroes call home is becoming increasingly hostile. (Be creative; public battles violate city noise ordinance laws, a hero's outfit is deemed obscene by a local court, and so on.) Do they tough it out and hope the ungrateful Teeming Millions come to appreciate the PCs again, or do they undergo the hassle of moving to a new location?
- Someone has managed to convince the public that the PCs are moving, and have managed to have power, phone, mail forwarding and other services to one location. Who is behind this? And what is the significance of the new address? The site of something beneficial? Unspeakably horrible? The rook-challenges-knight maneuverings of Hidden Masters? Or a desperate last-ditch attempt for a frantic person to involve the PCs in a matter she has otherwise been cursed, forced, or forbidden from contacting?
- The new location the players move to is the former site of an ancient Aztec Burial Mound, the *real* resting spot of Topebeard, the hotel where one of the PCs had their Lunar Luau Junior Prom, or similar ominous locale. What will happen to the heroes as the Significant Anniversary approaches? And, more importantly, what drives otherwise rational young adults to concoct monstrosities like Lunar Luaus?
- At a horribly inconvenient time, the PCs are evicted by their landlord, who is using some clause that lets him do what he wants. . . unless (of course) the PCs would be interested in performing a *teeny* little favor in exchange for a continued home. . .

The PCs are moving, and decide that, rather than transport a jar of Bread & Butter Pickles, they should just go ahead and eat the last seven gherkins. Yum!

(Admittedly not all causes, results, and complications for moving will immediately be applicable for most groups.)

The point is, moving is something that is done frequently by many people at least once in their lives, and very often several times a decade. Try incorporating a bit of mundane realism into your game, and you might be surprised. . . especially if the mundane is exciting enough.

Now if you'll excuse me, I've been awake for forty hours, and the novelty is wearing off. . .

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Terror T.R.A.X.: Track of the Vampire**. (You can tell the specific one because of the question mark.)

(Four stars) "One of the most annoying of all dimensions in the multiverse is Wimp World. . . . A typical street sign on Earth saying 'Yield' says 'Give In' here. No one drives over 5 mph. Airplanes rarely fly more than 200 feet off of the ground. Someone who drinks milk after the expiration date is termed 'reckless.' No one runs with scissors. Everyone flosses."

by Michael Leza

Photographs by [Keith Johnson](#)

It's a fact of life. You're in the middle of a tense moment of roleplaying -- a heated argument over feeding grounds in White Wolf's *Mind's Eye Theatre Vampire* game. Ivan the dreaded Prince is towering over poor Mick, a rough and tumble vampire biker who's in a little over his head. In a desperate last minute bid for his existence, Mick slips a knife out of his boot and leaps to his feet. Then, the dreaded words are heard, "Physical challenge. I'm brutally stabbing you."

Sigh. What ensues is a long, boring series of rock paper scissors and such colorful phrases as "I am brawny enough to hit you," and "I am quick enough to dodge." The scene's dramatic tension is gone, and you're left with a bunch of people in funny clothing joking around out-of-character while two people mark up their character sheets and wonder why they didn't spend that last 3 experience on that first level of fortitude.

This is how it often is, but it is not how it is supposed to be.

Below are some suggestions for how to spice up your live action roleplaying combat.

Combat Is Roleplaying, Too

One of the more common false distinctions in live action is drawn between roleplaying and combat. For many people these are two distinct parts of the same game. What many of these people haven't realized is that combat is roleplaying. You can still stay in character and roleplay while you use the system to work out the results of your character's actions. Sadly, many otherwise deep characters become stoic blocks of cheese when in combat, standing there and ferociously slamming their fists into anything that walks into their reach.

Sure, you could just mill around and spray people with your machine guns whenever your turn comes, but wouldn't it be more fun to laugh maniacally while doing so? Or glare in hatred as your opponent grips you with his telekinesis and begins slamming your head into the ceiling? If your character is normally energetic and hyper, wouldn't he be tempted to speak up while the two titanic werewolves pound on each other?

Remember, just because combat is going on doesn't mean roleplay has to stop. Staying in character is vital to maintaining the flow of the scene both during and after the fighting.

Setting the Scene

Back to Mick and Prince Ivan, now in their second round of combat. Mick has been disarmed and is standing there in front of one of the oldest, most powerful vampires in the region. Thinking back to the above section, he exclaims, "You'll never take me alive."

Unfortunately for Mick, without a weapon he's probably right on the mark. Mick desperately looks around and feels dread creep down his back as he comes to the realization: the players and the storyteller forgot to set the scene.

A good dramatic combat can not take place in a vacuum. Unfortunately for Mick, the scene hasn't been defined past, "You're in a gothy place." Now, when Mick's player needs the most to improvise a new weapon or method of escape, he's helpless.

So, it's simple. Set the scene before the combat begins. If possible, a storyteller should set the scene in detail before the game even begins. An ideal scene is mapped and written up with just enough detail to be helpful, without being so detailed that it doesn't allow for improvisation on the part of the players. It's also important to make sure the real world location can mirror out-of-character what exists in character. Yes, we'd all love to have a gun fight set on top of neighboring skyscrapers, but if all you have is one small room with 30 people packed in, maybe that's not the best place for that scene.

The storyteller should also set up any tables, chairs, or other items which might be in the scene if they are available. Extra objects (usually chairs and boxes) can also be labeled and used as stand-ins for things in the room like support pillars, doorways, walls, or anything else that might be needed. Make sure they are clearly labeled, though; it wouldn't do to have a group of characters meeting around a support pillar because the players thought it was a table.

Remember that if it makes sense and it helps the scene, go ahead and make a small change to the setting. Adding a low hanging bar perfect for swinging a kick into someone's face isn't going to change the game mechanics of the scene, but it sure will spice up the action. *(Note: Please do not swing-kick into people's faces from low hanging bars in real life. This is all make believe.)*

Combat in Live Action Roleplaying

Running the Combat

Well, Mick blinks once and suddenly he is in the ballroom of an old hotel, long since closed down "for safety violations." The room has tables off to the side where people can quietly sit and talk, and a large open central area where court is held. There are several large chandeliers hanging from the ceiling, and lucky for Mick one is conveniently located right above the space between him and Prince Ivan.

Mick grins, as a plan begins to form in his head.

Posing

Dramatic posing is one of the classic elements of dramatic combat. If you need some good examples, check out any Kung Fu action movie that came out of Hong Kong, or even the classic *Big Trouble in Little China*. Right before people fight, there is usually a scene of dramatic posing and talk. This is a fun thing to add to the game, and if both players agree to extend the posing for several actions, it can sometimes upstage the fight itself.

Ivan gather's his cloak around him and scowls at Mick. Imperiously, he points down at the younger vampire and commands him, "Surrender, or die!"

Mick, having watched too many Bruce Lee movies, drops into a Kung Fu stance, grins at Ivan, and makes a "come here" gesture with his forward hand. His gravelly biker voice is steady as he taunts Ivan, "Come get some."

Let the Battle Begin

Now, the fight has finally started, and it's time to deal with the system. Luckily, *Mind's Eye Theatre* is designed to help make combat interesting. Sure, maybe you're quick enough to land a one-two-three on your opponent, but what does a one-two-three look like?

Right, why not show us? No, don't stand up and start hitting the other player in the face. But stand a safe distance away and shadow box the movements how you think your character would throw them. Doing this helps everyone involved picture the combat how its really being fought, and also allows your opponent to react to your moves in a logical, consistent, and in character way.

If the move can not actually be acted out (for whatever reason), you should still try to describe in as much detail as seems reasonable what your character is doing. If your action involves movement, moving to where you'll end up is also usually a good idea.

It's also important to keep in mind that even though it is good to act out actions if you can, don't constrain your character unreasonably. Many characters are vastly more physically capable than their players, and while it might be impossible for the player to leap down the side of a cliff, jumping from outcropping to outcropping until he hits the bottom, the character just might be athletic enough to pull the stunt off. *(Note: Please do not try to descend a cliff by jumping from outcropping to outcropping. You will die.)*

As Ivan suddenly darts forward in a blur of motion, sword flashing out of its scabbard and arcing at Mick's neck, Mick whips around into a crouch, pulling his gun and leveling it at the chandelier's chain. He grins at Ivan as he squeezes off a round. Meanwhile, back in the real world Ivan's and Mick's players have both opted to take extra actions this round, and spend the first action drawing weapon cards and acting out their movements. The second action, Mick and Ivan are taking directly opposed actions and whoever wins the challenge will have his victory condition take effect. Ivan's player steps up and swings the note card at Mick's player's neck (with a couple of feet of clearance; it's a sword after all) and Mick's player crouches and aims his note card up at the imaginary chandelier, grinning as he does so.

Called Shots

While most tabletop rule systems have a system for called shots, *Mind's Eye Theatre* doesn't really go into any detail about them. However, considering the nature of live action combat, every shot should probably be targeted. Very few people simply throw wild punches or shoot generically "at" someone. Every shot will probably end up "called" if you're acting out the combat, so don't worry about it.

Some people become concerned when every shot becomes a called shot to the eye, or the brain, or the crotch. However, often times this accurately reflects the intentions of people in a real fight. Vital points are a common target of people who intend to win a fight at all costs; there is no reason this shouldn't be different in a roleplaying game.

Ivan's player has won the challenge, and since last round he made a called shot to Mick's throat, Mick's life span has just been drastically shortened. Or has it?

Describing Injuries

One of the other factors that helps negate the seeming advantage of constant called shots is the fact that the defender should always describe the actual injuries (or the Storyteller, if he chooses to exercise that right). Thus, you can make a called shot to someone's neck with your sword, but maybe they pulled back quick enough that it simply chopped their

throat open instead of taking their head off.

Of course, the game mechanics remain the same, so even if the wound "looks like just a scratch," you must have taken (or dealt) at least a wound level worth of internal injury from that sword swipe.

Well, it looks like Mick will survive for at least another three seconds, as he managed to pull his head back far enough that he has simply had his throat cut. Ivan snarls in frustration and swings his sword at Mick's neck again. Mick, looking startled and frightened from his brush with death, tries to roll out of the way of the sword and squeeze off another round at the chandelier (which is still right above Ivan's head). Ivan's player swings the note card again, and Mick's player describes his character's roll, takes a step back, crouches again and points his note card up in the air again and shouts, "bang bang!"

Scripted Combat

Sometimes, a Storyteller wants to have a grand, epic combat without the inevitably slow series of challenges needed to work out what happens. This is when scripting comes in handy. Don't be afraid to work out how the combat is going to go before hand, and then when the dramatic situation calls for it simply act out what happens (note: please do not start hitting each other with swords, or anything for that matter. No touching) for the enjoyment of the other players and the furthering of the story. Sometimes a combat script can even be triggered by a certain condition reached from a normal combat.

Combat in Live Action Roleplaying

Mick's player wins the challenge. Ivan's sword eats nothing but air as Mick rolls out of the way. Mick's .45 speaks twice in quick succession as he blasts the chain holding the chandelier. The heavy iron chandelier slams down on Ivan, breaking his legs and pinning him to the ground. Ivan's player lies down on the ground and tries to grimace convincingly for a moment.

Unfortunately, what Mick (and Mick's player) did not know is that Ivan was really a demon posing as the prince, and Mick has just broken that disguise. As the suit of skin that was Ivan begins to crumble, a new and horrifying form snaps up, throwing the chandelier off like a toy and rising to its full twelve feet of height. From the skeletal form two huge wings unfold, and a tooth filled maw snaps threateningly in Mick's direction.

Just then Justinius, the sheriff (and the character who is scripted to fight this demon when it gets revealed) steps up, firmly pushing Mick behind him.

Justinius draws his sword and points it at the demon, his voice steady as he proclaims, "In the name of the Prince, prepare to die." The demon crouches, coiling for a pounce, its only response a tearing hiss and a snort of warm, brimstone scented air. The epic combat begins. . .

Die, Flee, or Negotiate

Inevitably, every combat comes to an end. This does not always mean that one side is dead or knocked out. Often if someone is losing and fears they will continue to do so in a real fight, they will attempt to flee or talk. Also, sometimes both combats will come to an unspoken agreement to stop and rest for a moment while both sides catch their breath. This is a perfect time to get some quick dialog in, and maybe even stop the combat entirely as the fighters realize they would be better off talking about their differences than slugging it out.

It is vital that players remain in character in this regard. If you are playing an honorable character, it's not very likely

that you will continue to hit someone who is trying to talk to or surrender to you. Take a round off from taking offensive actions and do some talking. Then again, if you've got some violent traits or a hatred for your opponent, you're probably going to keep fighting until you've won or you're knocked out.

Remember, if you really enjoy rock-paper-scissors and all this sounds like too much trouble, throw it out. If you come up with some awesome idea which makes the above sound childish and boring, implement it (and submit a copy!). Regardless of anything else, the goal is to have fun and roleplay.

Suggested Films

Below are some good movies you can watch if you want to see some wild cinematic fighting. They're great for ideas of how a supernatural creature might fight differently from a normal person.

- *The Matrix*
- *Once Upon a Time in China (I, II and III)*
- *Big Trouble in Little China*
- *The Crow*

by David P. Summers

Art by Dan Smith

The shaman settled himself down next the blood stain. These "city people" might be able to turn out metal weapons and armor, and their sorcery was impressive enough, but their knowledge of spirits was pitiful. Sure they had religious rituals for the dead, but it would seem that, every now and then, a soul would get "missed." When that happened, those the ghost haunted had little idea what to do.

Indar sighed; he would have to deal with the spirit that had been haunting the area since the murder. Not that he cared that much for what happens to this city, but he felt an obligation as a shaman to see that the soul got to it proper destination, even if it hadn't been one of his people. He laid out the lock of hair he got from the widow and his charms. Then he began to draw the proper symbols by sprinkling lines of cornmeal around them. The pigeon he had brought as a sacrifice cooed nearby. . . .

One of the staples of both the fantasy genre and of mythic tales is the shaman (and the spirits he interacts with). People have been interested in *GURPS Voodoo* because, in addition to its other qualities, it has a new and interesting magic system. Since the system is already based on spirits, it is especially useful for handling shamanic magic. However, there are number of differences between the TL 7 Shadow War setting described in *GURPS Voodoo* and a typical TL 3 fantasy setting. There are also some differences between the modern vision of spirits presented in the book and a vision that is closer to a medieval/historical one. This article is an attempt to guide those who might like to use this system to run shaman characters in a TL 3 fantasy setting.

Types of Spirits

Here are some types of spirits that could be used in a *GURPS* spirit magic campaign. This is not a complete list, and a GM may not want all of them to be present in his campaign. A GM is encouraged to pick those that suit him/her and to add others. It is suggested that a GM allow spirits to speak the language of the intelligent species that is dominant in the area, unless the GM wishes to either have a Spirit Language skill or give each type of spirit its own language. It should be noted, when GMing spirits, that they tend to be willful and mercurial. They often have little understanding of Physical reality. They may not understand that a 100 foot drop will kill a human.

Place: Any place that is "significant," and has been around long enough, can have a spirit associated with it. A spirit might inhabit a specific mountain. A lake spirit might be associated with a certain lake or a river might have a river spirit. Even a large significant rock or a waterfall can have a spirit associated with it. Generally, a place that is significant enough to be warrant naming (or would be if there was anyone around for places where there are no people) might have a spirit. Such spirits are found at the place where they are associated. Unlike other spirits, they will generally not seek to possess other beings (since they are tied to the location). They are also are more likely to materialize physically (e.g. the water nyad). They are dependant on the good condition and existence of their place. If

it is destroyed, they are destroyed; if it is fouled, they are fouled. The lady of the lake in Arthurian legends could be an example of a lake spirit (albeit one that takes a peculiar interest in human affairs).

Disease: Spirits were thought to be the agents of disease in medieval times. They can be passed on from victim to victim. They can generally be found only in diseased animals and plants. They will not materialize and will either be in possession of a being, or looking for one to possess. The disease spirit represents a classic "evil" spirit. Possession by a disease spirit will cause the subject to suffer from a specific disease (there are different spirits for each disease).

Action: Spirits can be associated with action and motion. Rather than being associated with what the universe is made out of, they are associated with how it "acts" (see elementals below). You don't refer to "air" spirits, but a recurring type of wind (like the Californian Santa Anna or the French Mistral) might be caused by wind spirits. Similarly, a large and constant ocean current might have a spirit associated with it. These spirits might be found wherever the action is occurring, though if the action is spread over a large area, they may be hard to localize. The distinction between these spirits and elementals can get hazy, but generally the elemental represents the mere existence of some matter and the spirit represents a higher property, in this case how the element acts in the world. They do not possess beings and they do not materialize, but they may be induced or compelled to cause or (less likely) cease the action they represent. They use the Poltergeist effect for this purpose (p. 85 of *GURPS Voodoo*).

Animal: Any species of animal will have a spirit associated with them. This is especially true of a numerous species. This only applies to "animals" (racial IQ<8); "intelligent animals" have a soul. The spirits are associated with the species as a whole and not necessarily with each individual animal. Animal spirits do not usually posses someone out of malice, but a shaman may invoke them to take on a favorable aspect of the animal in question. They do materialize, but rarely.

Plant: Old and large plants may have spirits associated with them. The classic spirit here is the tree spirit (particularly in oaks). They are much like place spirits.

Ghosts: When an intelligent species dies, its soul can live on as a spirit. They are described in *GURPS Voodoo* (p. 55). Such spirits are sometimes found near where their bodies are buried or they were killed, such as in haunted British castles.

Abstract Ideals: There can be spirits associated with human concepts, emotions, and ideals, such as strength, healing, hatred, vengeance, etc. Often in stories, only the effects of these spirits (an angry mob, etc.) are portrayed, implying that they can't be localized. Perhaps this is because of the generality of the concepts. In other settings they are summoned and manipulated just like other spirits to gain their aspects. It is up to the GM if these spirits can be pinpointed in the physical world, or in the spirit real, and what the frequency is (if they exist at all). These spirits will generally not physically materialize.

Spirits vs. Gods

It is routine, in *GURPS Voodoo*, for initiates to invoke the presence of gods on a casual basis as a source of their power. However, in many fantasy settings the direct intervention of the gods is rare and shamanic magic is distinctly separate from divine magic. In fact, in many settings the cleric exists as the indirect agent of a god who can not act directly. Also, many of the spirits a shaman is often portrayed as interacting with in medieval stories are not present in the Shadow War setting.

The solution is simply to replace the manifestation of the gods with the appearance of the appropriate spirits. If one was running a campaign where gods manifested casually on behest of mortals (particularly where the line between "spirit" and "god" is a fine one), the spirits presented here can be used in addition to the manifestation of gods.

Spirit Stats

This brings up the question of how to come up with the stats for the spirits? One method is to pick out a manifestation

listed in **GURPS Voodoo** that has the stats and power level that seem to be appropriate, take out just the game mechanic numbers, and then redo the description. Additionally, one can change the attributes using the attribute cost chart (the points from lowering one stat are used to raise another). The manifestations are classified as major, moderate, and minor, and this can be used to similarly classify spirits.

Another approach is to use the Ghost package (using the point cost for a ghost that can remain indefinitely) on page 55 of **Voodoo**. Many spirits have abilities that are a subset of the those in the ghost package. If a spirit doesn't have a certain power listed, delete it and reduce the cost. Dream Travel, Possession, The Poltergeist Effect, Altering Probability, the ability to be seen and heard, and Full Materialization are all considered roughly equal and reduce the cost of the package 20 points. (**GURPS Undead** has a somewhat more extensive treatment for modifying the point cost of ghosts, p. 52-54.) A correlation between a ghost's point total and the class of an invocation can be inferred from the rules for Spirit Ally on p. 61 of **Voodoo**. A 101-150 point ghost is equivalent to a minor manifestation, a 151-200 is a moderate manifestation, and a 201+ point ghost is equivalent to a major manifestation.

Elementals & Sorcery

Elementals are not considered spirits. Elementals are fundamentally, part of the building blocks of reality. They are the expression of the elements that make it up reality (Earth, Air, Water, Fire). That is why sorcerers, who are adept at modifying reality, can create them so easily. The idea that are something that can be *created* by "mere mortals" sets them a step lower than other entities. Conversely, spirits are independent entities with a measure self awareness and free will. In fact, some spirits are the souls of intelligent creatures who have died (ghosts and such).

Generally dealing with elementals will be considered primarily the domain of the sorcerer and spirits the domain of the shaman. This helps keep the distinction between shamanic and sorcerous magic clear. Similarly, it is recommended that the GM restrict some of the necromantic spells in **GURPS Magic**, **GURPS Grimoire**, and **GURPS Undead** that allow mages to easily control spirits (Sense Spirit, Turn Spirit, etc.). These spells could apply only to undead spirits (which makes more sense for a necromantic spell anyway) or be disallowed completely.

Encountering Spirits

The group glided silently along, looking for the raiding party. Five of the tribe's horses were gone already. They couldn't afford to loose more. But their foe was also skilled and so far they had come up empty.

One of the party, Indar, wasn't the best tracker. However, his reason for being along soon became apparent when he noticed "something" in a large oak tree they passed. There was a spirit in it. "Probably a dryad," Indar whispered and signaled the rest to stop. The rest waited patiently as Indar began his ritual, they had been through this before.

A beautiful young "woman" with green hair stepped out of the tree and looked around, eyeing Indar's fellows warily. "What do you want of me?" she asked

"We search for men, darker and shorter, who may have passed your tree recently," Indar explained. "We are at war with them."

"The conflicts of men are of little interest to me; why should I help you?" she replied disinterestedly.

Indar bargained: "Should you help us, I can heal the disease on that limb of your tree and pledge that none of my people will take wood from the stand of trees."

*More bargaining ensued, but soon the deal was sealed. The dryad had indeed
seen their enemy pass her tree. She had even remembered them. . . .*

While traveling on the Physical World, a shaman will come across spirits. As a general guide, when the issue comes up, a GM may roll 3d6. On a 9 or less the shaman is in the area of a minor spirit that he/she may sense according the rules in **GURPS Voodoo**. On a roll of 7 or less the shaman may be in the presence of a moderate spirit, and on a roll of 5 or less a major spirit may be encountered. Obviously a GM may modify or ignore these guidelines entirely. For example, a certain large oak that was center of spiritual activity maybe more likely, or even certain, to have a spirit.

Possession is still handled by spirit combat. Since spirit combat may be a turning point of a situation, it is expanded from one simple roll. Instead it consists of a series of attack and defense rolls until one sides attack get through the other's defense. Rolls are still made against Will+Initiation. Any attempt at "tricks," etc. are treated as Feints as per **GURPS Basic** p. 96. A character in spirit combat is at a -4 to defend attacks made against his corporeal body.

If the Shaman wins, he/she may automatically force the spirit to flee. Any control another shaman may have had over the spirit will be lost. Alternately, the shaman may now try to control the spirit by casting the appropriate ritual or instigating another spirit combat. Winning this spirit combat gains control as per the Mastery ritual. If a shaman looses any spirit combat, he is possessed as per the rules in **GURPS Voodoo**.

Spirit Realm

A shaman may wish to enter the spirit realm for a number of reasons; To escort a soul of a recently deceased to the afterlife, to find a spirit (either a specific spirit or a specific type of spirit) that he is unable to locate in the physical world, to gain a bonus in the conduct of his rituals, to gain visions of the future, etc. To enter the spirit realm the character must enter a trance as per p. 118-119 of **GURPS Religion** (for example, by meditating with drums, etc. for 10 min) or p. 59 of **GURPS Voodoo** (see AutoTrance). Entering the spirit realm gains a +2 to rituals (as per Auto Trance in Voodoo). Once in the spirit realm the character may encounter hostile spirits or may even, if he wanders around, get lost.

While the spirit realm does *generally* correspond spatially to the physical world, the land marks are completely different and movement doesn't obey the same laws. Consequently, knowledge of the physical world is of little help in

navigating the Spirit Realm. Finding your way around the spirit realm requires use of the Navigation (Spirit Realm) skill (M/A, defaults to IQ-5). One enters the spirit realm based on where you are in the real world. A shaman escorting a soul to the afterlife must make a straight roll vs Navigation (Spirit Realm) provided he has done it before (e.g. someone has previously shown him the way). If he fails by 2 or less, he fails in his task but is not lost. In general, it will take roll(s) of Navigation (Spirit Realm) to find a place in the spirit realm and roll(s) of Navigation (Spirit Realm) +2 to retrace one's steps. To search randomly (say for a specific kind of spirit) will only require a roll to find one's way back (provided the Shaman hasn't been negligent in keeping track of where he/she is).

A lost shaman must either hope for rescue from a fellow shaman, find a friendly spirit that is able to understand that the shaman has a body in the physical word that he needs to get back to, or keep searching for a way back. To find a way back to his body, the shaman needs to make one roll (since he is lost, he doesn't retrace he steps, but seeks to find a direct path back) at a penalty for how far he has traveled, usually equal to -1 for each roll that would have been necessary to retrace his steps. Repeated attempts are at a cumulative -1 penalty. However, a shaman can always find his way back on critical success. The shaman is generally allowed one roll hourly for the first day and daily after that (though time can often move differently in the spirit realm). While the shaman is away from his/her body it will not eat or drink and will slowly waste away, see p. 128 of *GURPS Basic*. If the body dies, the shaman will become a lost ghost trapped in the spirit realm until he can find his way to the afterlife.

The odds of encountering malevolent spirits are left up to the GM. A straightforward task such a escorting a soul to the afterlife or conducting a ritual should be unlikely to cause such an encounter. A shaman wandering about (such as to get visions of the future or some other vision quest) will have a significant chance. The number of Navigation (Spirit Realm) rolls a character makes will be a guide to how much "wandering about" he is making (any measure of "distance" will be generally irrelevant). Specifically looking for spirits will increase these chances further.

Raising Initiation

To increase one's initiation level (or gain one of the advantages associated with initiation) should be require some sort of trial. This might involve a dangerous spirit quest to find something significant to the shaman or to appease a spirit. The GM is encouraged to have the player create an outline of where their shaman intends to go and who they will entreat, etc. Sacrifices can improve the odds. Such sacrifices can range from small (pain, fasting, etc.) to moderate (tattoos, ritual scaring, vow of chastity, etc.) to severe (loss of a limb, and eye, etc.). Of course the improvement in the odds will depend on the severity of the sacrifice. Alternatively, a GM may allow the points, or a portion thereof, generated by such a disadvantage to be applied toward raising initiation, gaining additional initiates advantages, etc.

Rituals

There are only a few changes in the rituals themselves. They seem generally balanced for most fantasy settings. New rituals should be based on what one can send a spirit to do. Effects should not be at the direct will of the caster, since he is not directly causing the effect. Instead they should assume indirect action through a spirit. For example, a spell that causes a victim to hallucinate or an object to move as a caster wills is primarily sorcerous in effect. One that causes things to occur according to the nature of a spirit, or as a spirit could be directed, is shamanic in effect.

Specific Rituals

Chaperone   See Voodoo, page 75

This one is a little overpowered for TL 3 campaigns. Basically it means that every member of a party with a shaman in it will be immune to the first hit. This will possibly work a bit better if the protection was not automatic. Apply an IQ roll for the spirit to see if it realizes it should act. For example, a spirit might not realize that getting an axe in the chest is bad for the mortal. Conversely, it might decided that it needs to stop that mosquito bite.

Succor   See Voodoo, page 75

Healing is fairly common in most fantasy settings so this ritual may need to be made more effective. All Initiates may use it as if there were fifth level Initiates.

New Rituals

Guide the Missile   Path of Movement-8

A spirit guides a chosen missile to its target. The initiate must call out the target and point to it (either with a hand or other object like a stick, wand, gun, etc.). This can be done as part of casting or firing and counts as a free action. The spirit can guide all missiles to their targets for a +4 to hit and can also speed up slower missiles (arrows, rocks, etc. but not bullets, blasters, etc.) for a +2 damage.

Guide the Weapon   Path of Movement-8

This ritual calls a spirit to help guide a chosen weapon. The effectiveness is limited by how well the spirit can anticipate the weapon's movements. Thus it is dependant on how capable the spirit summoned is. The modifier to your to-hit roll is equal to (margin of success-3). (Yes, this ritual can actually make it harder to hit.) The spirit cannot react fast enough to assist with parries. The shaman must make a ritual roll every minute to keep the spirit around.

Movement   Path of Movement-5

This ritual assists in the movement of a PC or his vehicle. The shaman gains a spirit with a ST equal to (margin of success x 5). The spirit will push constantly as directed by the shaman at the time of summoning for as long as described in the duration table on page 81 of *Voodoo*. The spirit may be released early, but will not change tasks without a new ritual.

Loyal Object   Path of Luck-4

This ritual seeks to return objects to the shaman. The ritual may be cast on any portable object and begins working when the shaman looses contact with the object and hasn't told it to "stay." When someone headed in the right direction passes by, the spirit causes him to notice the object and pick it up (to examine it, etc.). If he goes in a different direction he loses the object (it falls out of his pocket, he realizes he had no interest in it, etc.). This happens until such time as the object makes it back to the caster.

Passers-by will only move the object if it is convenient for them to do so. A pen or book will move quickly, since they are light and very portable, while a stone statue will likely stay where it is unless a group of blacksmiths with a cart happen to drop by. The ritual will not work on someone who receives or steals the object directly from the caster, and carriers get a Will roll, minus the caster's level of initiation, to resist carrying obviously dangerous objects, etc. Carriers will be unaware of what they are doing, and people who aren't carrying the object will ignore it entirely.

The speed with which the object returns to the caster is up to the GM. A piece of paper may make its way from one side of a major city to another in as little as a few hours, while a sword lost in the underbrush during a battle may take months or years to come to light, and just as long to make its way from a small village to the big city where its owner lives.

Bind the Spirit   Path of the Spirit-8

This binds a previously summoned and controlled spirit to a physical object. The spirit can be freed by the caster or by breaking the object. It can also contact/posses anyone touching the object. Unless you can get the spirit to agree before hand (not likely, generally a very good reaction or better), it will *not* be pleased. Any spirit so bound will automatically have a very bad reaction to the shaman when it comes out again.

This allows a shaman's spirit to travel with an animal. Essentially the shaman leaves their body, goes into the spirit realm and attaches him/herself to the animal. (It is handy to be on good terms with the spirit the animal is associated with.) The shaman can direct the animal and can sense what the animal would sense. If the animal is killed, the shaman is dumped into the spirit realm and must find his/her way back to their body as if they were lost. However, the first roll is at a +2.

(Thanks to Pam Keller for trying this on her character and her suggestions.)

Tanks For The Memories: Alternate Ogres

"The tale of the 21st century has no happy ending -- dictatorial empires dominate it, and dictatorial fiefdoms follow it. Some players may not want to play in a universe where everything is doomed to fall into anarchy.
So change it!"
-- Jonathan Woodward, *GURPS Ogre*, p. 124

As **GURPS Ogre** growls its way into our mental HUDs, one thing becomes rapidly apparent: giant, sentient, most likely malevolent tanks are just too neat to keep penned up in the 21st century. The first option, of course, is pure and simple **GURPS Time Travel**. Suppose Paneurope develops a time gate and shoots a Huscarl back to World War II to help Hitler (or Charlemagne) unify the continent seven decades (or twelve centuries) early. Of course, before temporal inertia breaks, the Combine launches a desperate attack, siezes the time portal, and sends its own Mark IV (or a team of PC Ogre-killers) back to take over the Allied (or Abbasid) war effort and stop the increasingly-independent Paneuropean cybertank. If your love of giant tanks won't wait, however, here's four more Ogreish histories to churn up your gaming battlefield.

"Thus by such victory, not by machines, but in opposition to the principle of machines, has the freedom of states been preserved by the cunning of architects."
-- Vitruvius, *On Architecture*, Book X

The Emperor Trajan couldn't believe his luck. The Han, rulers of far Cathay, had apparently declared war on the Parthians over some trade routes in Central Asia. His legions marched into Parthia, siezing Mesopotamia, and then the Persian highlands, and then the roads into India. He dreamed of emulating Alexander -- until the waves of broken refugees told him of the horrible Han "moving fortresses." Han alchemists prepared the metals and powders (and bound the spirits) that gave these deadly *gui* (a word meaning both "tortoise" and "evil ghost") their life and power. Clad in impervious metal chi, they moved by themselves across the ground, spitting fire chi from long lances; the most powerful of their spells could leave craters where whole armies had formed. Trajan's military genius was taxed to the utmost managing a fighting retreat back to the Euphrates. Time and again, his legions formed up against the Han, and time and again, the *gui* thrust them aside. Now, in 105 A.D., Trajan desperately fortifies the Roman borders against the next spring's campaign. Hopefully, the crash alchemical program in Alexandria (studying fragments of captured Han armor and fire-lances) will be able to develop weapons and magics capable of stopping the Han onslaught, or Rome herself will burn under the fires of the tortoise-ghosts. The PCs in this **GURPS China-Imperial Rome-Ogre** milieu can be cinematically unkillable Roman warriors straight from the pages of David Drake, refugee yogic martial-arts masters from India, Parthian Magi, or Egyptian experimental magician-engineers.

"'[W]hat is the matter?' said one. 'Speak out.' 'Are we threatened with a fresh Reign of Terror?' asked another. 'Has the Corsican ogre broken loose?' cried a third."
-- Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

The mysterious chess-playing automaton of M. Maelzel only became a threat to the peace of Europe when its path crossed that of Franz Mesmer -- and Napoleon Bonaparte. Not even British intelligence can say who thought of combining the chess-player with mesmeric direction, although lurid rumor maintains that it was, in fact, the automaton who first made the suggestion by means of a printed card. The dictator's whim bankrolled Maelzel and Mesmer together with the American steam pioneer Robert Fulton, to build a mesmerically-controlled clockwork steam-powered guns platform. *L'Ogre* steamed into Germany in 1805, mesmerically directed by Marshal Masséna, but operating its weapons as practically and as efficiently as a master chess-player. The effect on the Austrian armies was terrific; they disintegrated and the French mopped up the Russians at Austerlitz. In 1806, Fulton built an ironclad steam float for *L'Ogre*, and Napoleon himself went under mesmeric trance to direct it in the invasion of England. The British fleet was unable to match *L'Ogre's* firepower, but an unlucky hit blew up the ship on which the entranced Napoleon rode. The automaton became infuriated; when it rolled onto British soil, it drove straight for London, somehow using mesmeric force to vastly increase the power of its guns and Congreve rockets. In ten hours, the city was a smoldering ruin, and *L'Ogre* announced that it was, in fact, *L'Empereur*, the Corsican genius' mind having

somehow transferred into the invulnerable body of the pneumatic death-machine. French troops moved in to occupy London, and in a lightning campaign, *L'Ogre* (the old name having stuck) crushed Prussia and Spain by 1807. Under the mesmeric lash of the mad steam-emperor, Fulton and Maelzel work to create new *Ogres* to house the minds of Bonaparte's brothers and favored marshals. America and Russia eye each other nervously, wondering which will be the mad mechanical dictator's next target -- and which will be called upon to ally itself with *les Ogres* on pain of devastation. Both have launched secret studies of mesmerism -- and of steam. PCs (ideally powerful psis themselves) can be soldiers, sailors, or spies (or conspirators against the disembodied Bonaparte) in this Napoleonic-era ***GURPS Psionics-Ogre*** crossover.

"When I left the plantation, I drew a long breath, and felt as if I had escaped from an ogre . . ."
-- Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Nobody thought the war would last this long. Nobody expected the Confederates to give in to insane desperation, and actually try to build the Organo-Galvanic Reconnaissance Engine. But after Grant took Vicksburg, Jeff Davis listened to what his ordnance chief told him -- that if that madman Donovan had read Frankenstein's notes correctly, a steam-tractor could be directed by a disembodied human brain. Only one in a hundred could survive the procedure without going mad (and the survivors were none too stable), but if there was one thing the War Between The States had produced in abundance, it was amputees willing to do anything to move again -- even have their brains removed and implanted into a galvanic webbing in the center of a deadly armored war-wagon. The Union soon learned how to build their own steam-wagons, but the men fighting them were no match for the Reb O.G.R.E.s. Spraying naphtha and Gatling fire, the Rebel war machines smashed through Union lines in Tennessee and Virginia. After the first wave of "Lighthorse" O.G.R.E.s had proven the technology, the heavier, deadlier Mark II "Calhoun" models took the war north. Meanwhile, O.G.R.E. ironclads swept the blockade, and the British began funneling supplies to the Confederacy, eager to see America torn to shreds. Although the Union still has the overwhelming advantage in men and equipment, only the South has Donovan, and the O.G.R.E. devices. New York has burned twice, a Mark III "Pompey" leveled Washington, and Grant has only recently retaken Chicago's ruins. The entire Ohio Valley is a mire of ash and mud, as is the Potomac. PCs can fight on either side in the ***GURPS Steampunk-Horror-Ogre*** game in this increasingly post-apocalyptic America of 1877.

" The Ogre does what ogres can,
Deeds quite impossible for Man,
But one prize is beyond his reach,
The Ogre cannot master Speech:
About a subjugated plain,
Among its desperate and slain . . ."
-- W.H. Auden, "August, 1968"

Konrad Zuse meant to take his advanced Z3 computer to Switzerland. But a shelled highway and missing road signs sent him right into the arms of the Red Army. Stalin's spies had already told him that the British and Americans were working on computers; he resolved that the Soviet Union would have Zuse's -- and much more. The Cold War became a Computer War. By 1948, both sides had deployed computer-and-radio-controlled tanks to Berlin. Experiments in guided missiles fed the development of computer-served, radar-controlled heavy rocket artillery. This paid dividends as both powers nuke-launched orbital weapons platforms. As the Soviets built ever larger (*Ogromniy*, "immense") computanks, the Americans and British worked to catch up. American armor proved the value of computanks when a squadron of twelve nuclear-armed O-52 Knoxes devastated four entire Chinese infantry divisions in Korea. The American O-55 Grant was the first nuclear-powered, nuclear-artillery computank; the Russians deployed an equivalent *Ogromniy* the next year. Orbital platform space armor provided the insights for feedback-enhanced battlesuits; infantry picked up the new rocket-launchers and stepped back into the front lines. Both sides massed their computanks along the Iron Curtain, waiting for the signal to rumble. When Hungary rebelled against the Russians, a computer circuit in an O-53 Tom Paine decided that was the signal and launched, cutting into computer-encrypted mode to signal its fellows to drive into East Germany. The waves of bombers never made it past the orbital cannon, and World War Three turned into a ground fight. This ***GURPS Atomic Horror-Ogre*** blend could support either grim, deadly military gaming, or a more radioactive and cinematic game of commando raids and Science! Perhaps the *Ogromniy* in Vladivostok and the American ON-53 Perry "seatanks" in the Sea of Japan must combine to battle Godzilla, or turn

their mighty cannon to the skies to battle the menace from Mars. Whether the enemy is the Red Planet or the Red Army, it's good to have a superheavy O-57 Patton roll up for reinforcements -- except these new computanks all seem to want to talk politics . . .

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

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by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

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Murphy's Rules

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Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons Adventure Game

Produced by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Jonathan Tweet, Jason Carl, Andy Collins, and David Noonan

Boxed set with one 32-page Rule Book, one 48-page Adventure Book, 32 pages of Reference, 1 map, 2 pages of counters, 1 "Read This First" sheet; $9.95

It's a mistake to try to review something based on what you *think* it should be versus what it actually is; thus "I felt the screenplay in *Titanic* was weak" is fair criticism, while "I wanted more ninjas in *Titanic*" is not.

Faced with this realization, I find myself struggling to review the ***Dungeons & Dragons Adventure Game***. This isn't a game that inspires me to heights of giddy delight, or sparks a raging inferno within me. No, it just is.

The game itself is high quality. The character sheets are full color (though you'll need to cut the double-page spreads apart yourself); the counters are in color and double-sided (though not made of the sturdiest stock); and the dice, while not the ultra-snazzy glitter/marble/speckled sorts, are a grand evolution from the dice made of Pez with crayon kits included with the early "Basic" sets. The booklets, while black and white, are well-formatted and easy to read.

The game itself? Well, the box says, "For 3 or more players of all ages." This is probably one of the most incorrect statements I've seen in a long time. If nothing else, the dice represent a choking hazard for a would-be two-year-old gamer. But more specifically the game suffers from a difficulty to stand alone as a game, in the way that Monopoly or Chess can.

The basic means of teaching the game to the uninitiated (either to *D&D 3rd* or roleplaying in general) in *D&DAG* is through the full-color handouts mentioned above. Within these sheets are rules for movement, skills, special abilities (sneak attacks, spellcasting, and others), and other basic maneuvers. Movement is handled with the map and counters, not unlike a traditional boardgame. The basic abilities are all spelled out on the character sheet to make it easier to learn; thus under the Dwarven Fighter's Speed of 3 it says, "You can move 3 spaces per turn." Likewise rules to attack are spelled out on each character sheet. Each sheet also pictures the six basic polyhedral dice for easy newbie reference.

The 32-page Rule Book is not unlike an appetizer for the ***D&D 3rd Edition Player's Handbook***. It contains enough equipment, spells, abilities, and the like to satisfy a surprising amount of play; of particular note are the eight pages of monsters (20 critters altogether). These rules are sufficient to advance a character up through second level; for third or above (or for non-basic skills) you'll need the ***Player's Handbook***. Fortunately, for perhaps the first time the game introduced here is the same (or almost the same) as that presented in the "real" rules (*D&D3*); as such there is no unlearning necessary when moving to the full rule set.

The Rule Book, while geared towards a simpler game, is nonetheless full; there are random door/trap/monster tables, magical treasures, and good (but very simple) advice for creating dungeons of the sort found in the Adventure Book.

The 48-page Adventure Book contains six adventures that each use the basic dungeon map. . . or portions of it. The first adventure is a simple two-room affair, the second dungeon has four rooms, and so on, up to the sixth adventure, which uses all 26 rooms. Since there are no doors marked on the dungeon map (instead relying on counters to indicate doors), the map can be surprisingly versatile. In addition the back of the map is blank grid, so imaginative DMs can

make their own maps.

The adventures range from the simple dungeon crawl to the. . . um. . . complicated dungeon crawl. Each room's text is laid out in the traditional " read this grey box!" format, with details for the most common actions (listening at doors, picking locks, kicking doors in, etc.) clearly stated for each room. The adventures are fairly diverse, despite being dungeon-based; there's cave crawls, crypt crawls, and dungeon crawls. There are many beasts, and being primarily Evil (the alignment system is simplified to Good/Neutral/Evil) they all deserve to die. At least, that's the impression I got. Which is one of the primary weaknesses of the game, in my opinion. . . and a reason why I mentioned the caveat about not judging a game by what you want it to be. All in all, there are about one or two chances for honest-to-goodness roleplaying; even those can be resolved by rolling the Diplomacy skill (if you fail you generally need to kill whoever you were trying to be Diplomatic with). While I personally would love to see an introductory game where the focus is on interacting with interesting characters, exploring or storytelling, *D&DAG* is not it; I'd need to stick with *Once Upon a Time* as a means of introducing folks to roleplaying via that route. Instead *D&DAG* is a fairly complex boardgame with some elements that could be construed as roleplaying. In fact, the entire crux of what roleplaying is generally like is contained in a sample transcript on pages 14-15 of the Rule Book. . . a book they specifically tell you not to read until you get a grasp on the die-rolling fighting parts of the game.

I'm honestly not sure how people not at least vaguely familiar with roleplaying could buy and use this set. As a comparison, I distinctly remember the solo adventure that introduced the last edition of the *D&D Basic Set* (from '83 or '84, if my mind remembers right), which introduced mapping, exploration, and combat, all while not requiring any other knowledge of role-playing. (Again, that warning I mentioned above; just because I wanted a solo adventure doesn't mean *D&DAG* should be faulted for not having one.)

In addition, despite the "all ages" proclamation, anyone who would GM this would *have* to be older, if for no other reason than to understand some of the vocabulary. Here's part of a sample room description: "The portcullis is made of sturdy iron, and its sharp spikes dig into the ground. Inside the cave, just out of reach, is a crude winch. From your vantage point, you can see almost all of the cave." In addition, there are some fairly gruesome moments: there's undead, a necromancer, a hellhound, and a dead dwarf in a barrel. *(Ick.)* While these aspects are glossed over, it would nonetheless probably be inappropriate for really young folks.

On the whole, as an aid for a person experienced (however mildly) with gaming (playing the role of Dungeon Master), the *Dungeons and Dragons Adventure Game* could make a good introduction to people, young and old, for people unfamiliar with *D&D*. And at less than $10, this is truly a bargain to see if someone would be interested in the whole game. As a standalone game, though, the *D&DAG* simply doesn't seem to explain what it probably needs to with as much hand-holding as a product described as "all ages" would need to.

-- Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Death in Freeport, a D20 System Adventure

Published by Green Ronin Publishing

Written by Chris Pramas

32 pages, $7.99

Chris Pramas, author of the excellent *AD&D* sourcebook/adventure *Vortex of Madness*, managed to write and publish one of the very first of the *D20* supplements in time for the release of the *Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook*. *D20*, the game system used by the newest edition of *Dungeons & Dragons*, is best explained at the Open Gaming Foundation website (and in the review of the *Third Edition Dungeons & Dragons Player's Handbook* in this issue of *Pyramid*).

Death in Freeport is a short adventure for beginning characters and is presented as the first in a series of adventures which take place in the city of Freeport, located on a small island cluster known as The Serpent's Teeth. A short boxed section of the adventure gives a few hints on incorporating the city into any already existing fantasy campaign. The opening of the adventure provides minor details on the history and creation of the city (founded by pirates who used the location as a hideout for several years before turning into an almost respectable city).

Details on the city are sketchy and a gamemaster interested in incorporating the city into his campaign will have to do quite a bit of work or else wait for additional Green Ronin *D20* adventures to add detailed information for him before using the city. This is the largest problem with "generic" adventures and I feel Freeport would have been better presented as a complete city location with adventures being published after the "city" book. This is a minor complaint for those gamemasters who intend on disregarding future Green Ronin adventures set in Freeport or those who enjoy fleshing out cities with only a map and the most basic of information to start with.

The adventure itself fills about half of the 32 pages and starts with the hunt for a missing librarian. Several interesting characters and a pretty rigid storyline pit the low-level characters against a race of serpent people (well detailed in the adventure and perfect for use in future game sessions) and an evil cult. The adventure relies on a heavy dose of investigative events mixed in with a few combat scenes. While it is fairly linear in nature, groups that enjoy thinking over fighting will find the adventure loads of fun and should probably get one or two evenings of play out of it (which is great for less than ten bucks).

Other than the one and a half pages of the book wasted with the necessary *D20* license text and a two-page spread of characters printed in a much larger text size than the rest of the book, the production values of Death in Freeport are adequate. The cover, by Brom, was originally one of the cards from the *Guardians CCG* published in 1995 and suffers from being printed slightly too dark and a little larger than it was intended (as has been known to happen when CCG art is printed at anything larger than the 2" x 2" square it is designed for). The interior illustrations range from superb to decent and in no way enhance or detract from the quality of the adventure. Other than the one and a half pages of the book wasted with the necessary D20 license text and a two-page spread of characters printed in a much larger text size than the rest of the book, *Death in Freeport* is fairly packed. Several handouts are included at the end of the adventure for the gamemaster to photocopy and pass out to his players.

Overall I found *Death in Freeport* a useful product and interesting enough that I look forward to picking up the next *D20* adventure Pramas publishes through his small-press game company. Being one of the first *D20* supplements,

Green Ronin Publishing had the chance here to set the quality level other small-press *D20* supplements will need to aim for. Happily, if all *D20* supplements are of this quality, *D&D* fans will have no reason to avoid small-press *D20* products.

-- Philip Reed

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by Christopher Paul

War games and tactical board games with miniatures abound, and I'm sure we've all seen truly gorgeous armies, or squads, or teams, or gangs (depending on the game) at conventions and on the boxes these wonderful games come in. I expect that many of us have bought a game and some figures for it, picked up some paints and brushes, and set to it ourselves. Finally, I would hazard a guess that most of the models that the vast majority of us have painted do not look like the lovely ones on the box, and, in fact, probably look like crud.

Why is that? I mean, all of these games and paint sets come with little guides about how to paint. Why, when I follow their directions, don't my miniatures come out really cool? Well, I'll tell you: Most little painting guides provides some very nice advice about color, about priming, and layering, and shading, and about various different brush techniques that can help make a miniature look really cool, but don't take into account the fact that most of us are clumsy and don't really know how to paint. Here I present three simple techniques that will allow you to paint like a klutz and have it look nice when you are done. My experience is entirely with 25mm scale models, but I expect that two of these three techniques will work at any scale.

The Clown Technique for Painting Eyes

One of the things the really makes or breaks a miniature for me is the face. If a figure's face comes out well, then I don't really care if part of his belt slopped up on his tunic, or if I accidentally blob-dotted one of the gems on his sword so that it looks like it is leaking; if the little guy has a good face, I can see the "soul" of the miniature and tell whether I like the model or not. Fortunately, most of the facial details are provided by the guy who sculpted the model; all except the eyes, that is. The eyes are just dull, slightly rounded protuberances on the bare model's face. Add good eyes to a miniature, and they are off to a great start.

Of course, the eyes are really tiny on a 25mm scale figure. If I'm a klutz, how the heck am I supposed to paint something that small with any degree of precision? Well, I'm not, and you aren't either. Paint sloppily but cleverly, and you will succeed. Here's how:

- **Step one:** Take white paint and a medium size brush and slobber the figure from ear to ear with one big stroke of white. Make sure that the entirety of each eye is covered with white.
- **Step two:** After waiting for the white to dry, select a pupil color and your finest brush. Get a bit of paint on the brush, and practice painting thin lines or your blotting pad, or newspaper, or whatever it is that you are working on. Once you are comfortable painting a thin line, pick up the model again. Starting somewhere

in the middle of the model's forehead, paint a thin line of pupil color down their forehead, across the center of their eye, and onto their cheek. This should be done in a single brush stroke, as cleanly as you can manage. Repeat for each eye. At this point, the model should look like a clown (see the picture). . . hence the name of the technique.

- **Step two and a half:** At this point, look at the model. Do the two pupil lines match in thickness? Do they both cross their respective eyes at about the center? If not, repeat step one (slobbering white across the face) and try again. Sometimes I nail it on the first go, but quite often I end taking two or three tries at one or both eyes until I am happy. Trust me, it is worth redoing a few times; it isn't super easy, but it is a heck of a lot easier than trying to pinpoint dot an eye like you were doing before, no?
- **Step three -- the final step:** Take your flesh color and a fine brush and slowly and carefully paint in around the eye, converting the model from a clown into a miniature with a really cool face. Note that if you get too much flesh in too close to the eye and they end up looking like they are squinting, or cockeyed or something, repeat step one. This is why I urge slowly painting in the flesh, because you can always add more paint, but you can't take it away.

Paint Subtractively

This fact brings me to my second technique. As I just noted, painting is fundamentally additive; you are always adding paint to the model. However, you can do amazing things while painting to accomplish the subtractive, that is, taking something away by adding something else. Clown Eye Technique is one example, but it is easy to generalize. Suppose you want to paint gold buttons on a model's coat, but every time you try to dot in the button, it blops funny and comes out poorly. No problem. After blopping in the buttons, take the coat color and hedge in around the fat buttons until

they are the right size. Want to paint thin black lines on a model's shield so you can make some heraldic device or something? Sure, start by trying to paint a nice thin line, but if you are a klutz like me, it is going to curve a little, and be wider in places. Again, no problem. Take the background color of the shield and subtract away the wide places.

Paint from the Inside Out

My third and final technique suggestion has to do with the order in which things are done. Most painting guides (and most people's intuition) suggest that you ought to do big things first and details last. This sounds nice, but how many times have accidentally slopped paint on a model's arm or the side of their shield while tying to brush past it on the way to detail a belt buckle or some other interior detail?

Think about it for a minute -- why do details last? Well, the only good reason I can think of is so that you don't accidentally slop up something you spent time and energy detailing while you are doing more "coarse" or bigger area painting. This is a reasonable logic as far as it goes, but I propose a different application of that same logic: Always paint from the inside out. Start with the areas closest to the model's "skin" and the areas that are toward the "center" and perhaps partially concealed by other body parts, or costume, etc. If you do this, you don't risk moving a wet brush past an area that is already "done" and klutzily screwing it up. Now, if all the details happen to be on the very outside of the model (weapon details, interesting squiggles on the model's armored shoulders, etc.) then you may well end up doing your details last, but you'll be doing it for a reason, and you will find that you are working less hard at painting and getting better results.

I hope that with these three techniques and some practice and patience you'll be well on your way toward painting miniatures that, when you pull them out of the box to play at a con, other people will be impressed with how good (or at least decent) they look.

Miscellanea II

I'm still unpacking. I don't have a working kitchen sink. I cannot cook without one. It is sad.

Anyway, here's five goodies I've (re)discovered from my unpacking phase. Not that any of you should be particularly interested, but what the heck. . .

- *Harry Anderson's Games You Can't Lose* by Harry Anderson and Turk Pipkin. This (out of print) book from 1989 is a great resource and reference for any would-be con man character. What is the magic number for betting that two people in a room share the same birthday? (22.) How can your character play ten games of chess all at the same time and break even? (Play postal chess: White on boards 1-5, black on boards 6-10. Play white's move from board 1 on board 6, board 2 on board 7, etc. Then play black's move from board 6 on board 1. Repeat.) Even if you *know* all the tricks in this book, the writing style will have your character in a three-card-monte mood.
- **King Arthur Companion** by Phyllis Ann Karr for **Pendragon**. A wonderful companion to **GURPS Camelot**, this 1983 book is drier but more jam-packed for dealing with a historical Arthurian campaign. Complete with map and timeline, this book is, in my mind, as complete (if somewhat inaccessible) a resource as can be hoped for.
- My Viewmaster, from Tyco. <Ka-shunk!> <Ka-shunk!> From dinosaurs to Tron, the Viewmaster is a great prop for a myriad of situations. Virtual Adept focus, **Changeling** bunk, strange time portal to eras past. . . like dinosaurs or the Mighty Morphing Power Rangers. What fun!
- The *Beetlejuice* soundtrack, by Danny Elfman. I spent the better part of a year looking for this soundtrack, only to learn I already *had* a copy. Weird. Anyway, I can highly recommend any of the Danny Elfman soundtracks, though the less memorable ones are probably best. I can recommend *Music for a Darkened Theatre Volume 1*, which is a sort of "best of" for Elfman. (I don't know about *Volume 2*, since I don't have it.)
- *The Official Prisoner Companion* by Matthew White & Jaffer Ali. This is a wonderful guide to a neat show, and a great companion to **GURPS Prisoner**. I've flipped through it in the past when I needed adventure ideas (twice I've begun campaigns in idyllic but sinister "prisons"). (As an aside, I'm ashamed to admit I haven't seen as much of *The Prisoner* as I might like. . . but I understand a full DVD set is being released in England this week, and a partial set is scheduled for release in October here.)

Well, that should give you an idea what sinister secrets lurk in my unopened boxes. . . and what I'll draw inspiration from when I'm stuck for adventures or column ideas. Be very afraid.

* * *

Between the troubles Steve is having with Apple and my problems getting my sink fixed, I just realized. . . is there any better villain then a bureaucracy? What would James Bond *do* against a bureaucracy? ("Q, I need that gadget now." "Certainly, Bond. . . just fill out this paperwork.")

* * *

Okay; this week is the catalyst for something a little different with the ol' reviews. First off, you may have noticed that this is an all **D&D 3rd** Week (or, perhaps more correctly, a **d20** week) with our reviews.

But what you haven't noticed is something we haven't done yet. (Unless you're a Psychic Friend and can see the future, in which case I need a lottery ticket.) I'm curious to liven things up a bit with the reviews, and so to that end I'm interested in running "second opinions" on some high-profile products.

Here's how it works:

- You read a review of a product. You disagree with the review, OR you have some insight to add.
- You send me a short proposal to pyramid@sjgames.com briefly saying what you want to talk about. (For example: "The review of *Otter: The Frolicking 2nd Edition* was obviously written by someone who hadn't

played the game, but only read the book. I'd like to talk about how the game actually plays." or "I was a huge fan of **O:tF 1st Edition**, and would like to review it from the viewpoint of a disillusioned fan." or "The review of **O:tF 2nd Ed** completely failed to discuss how it adds to the entire *Mundo de las Criaturas*, and greatly strengthens the entire line." (Or some combination of all of these!)

- I e-mail back with a yes or no.
- You have two days from the time I write back to write the addendum review.
- I (hopefully) accept your review.
- Bam! You're in the magazine.

Now, with these "follow-up" reviews, you can freely access and "argue" with the other review. *Please* don't duplicate information from the other review; I can put a link to the other review at the beginning. Thus you don't need to say that Chapter One is character creation, Chapter Two details campaign information, etc. Just tell us how you disagree with the earlier review(s). Oh, and obviously limit critiques to the matter of the review; don't make attacks against the writer.

Above all, these secondary reviews need to be interesting. While "normal" reviews can be a bit dry (though I prefer they not be), these follow-up reviews need to have a bit more flair. In particular I think of movie reviewers I like; ideally, even if I never *see* the movie in question, I still get something interesting out of a good review.

For starters these follow-up reviews (I'm still trying to come up with a catchy name) will be limited to "big ticket" items; for the coming months it looks like that will mean **D&D 3rd Players Handbook** and **Dungeon Masters Guide**. (I don't think enough people *really* care about a second opinion for a random non-essential supplement for a mildly popular game.) But if a review sparks something in you, jot me a line. . . worst I can say is "no." (Unless you're like my friend and GM Dennis, who *still* hasn't subscribed. . . then the worst case I can do is publicly scorn. <SCORN> Subscribe, Dennis! **SUBSCRIBE!** </SCORN>)

So. . . that's my idea for reviews. I'm curious to see how it works out.

* * *

I've been meaning to mention: my column "Mile 333.3" received a total rating of 3.33.

Fnord.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Champions in 3-D**, p. 160.

(One star)

> "*By the Hoary Hosts of Hoggoth*
> *And by Ymir's frozen sea,*
> *I invoke the flames of Faltine*
> *To produce a cup of tea.*

"Mmm, that's hot. Calling on extradimensional beings for a cup of tea is like using a bazooka to kill roaches. . . ."

Pyramid Review

Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams

300 pages and Demo CD-Rom; $19.95

(Editor's note: make sure you read this week's [Random Thought Table](#) for information about reviews of this product.)

* * *

Consider the following statement: *Gravity's Rainbow* is a better book than *Hollywood Wives*. It may be completely true, but it doesn't say much about the quality of *Gravity's Rainbow*. By the same token, **Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition** is better than **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition**.

Don't get me wrong. There's a lot to like about **Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition** as seen in the **Player's Handbook**. The new artwork is gorgeous and evocative, and in the 286 pages of the main rulebook there's a lot of well-written and tightly-packed rules.

There are over 100 pages on character creation and another hundred-plus pages are devoted to spell lists. Immediately after the table of contents, the book begins telling you how to make a character. Six statistics are rolled on 4d6, with the lowest die dropped and the numbers assigned as you see fit. You choose a race, which will grant you certain abilities and raise one statistic by two points and lower another by two points (unless you play a half orc, in which case you get shafted by a +2 to strength and a -2 to both intelligence and charisma). The half-orc is the only "new" race, although it's really just a throwback to *1st Edition*, but halflings have also been changed a bit, making them less like hobbits and more like Kender from *Dragonlance*. I don't know why this change had to be made, but I preferred the hobbit clones. Much has also been made of the idea that monsters will be given full sets of statistics, so that they would be more like three-dimensional creatures and less like faceless sword-fodder. I have reservations that merely giving monsters the same statistics as characters will be enough; in the description of half orcs we learn that half-orcs who grow up with humans can be any alignment, but half orcs who grow up with orcs tend to be evil. So much for complex characterization.

All of the old classes are still around from **AD&D 2nd Edition**, with the Barbarian added into the core rules and a new class, the Sorceror, that is capable of casting wizard spells without formal training. In a change from previous additions of **AD&D**, any race may now be a member of any class, although some are easier than others. Multiclassing is now as easy as saying "I want to learn a new class this level." There are, however, some experience penalties for spreading yourself too thinly.

When a character is created, each of the six statistics generates a bonus number, ranging from -5 to +5. These bonuses affect skills and combat (which is now just another sort of skill use). The old system of nonweapon proficiencies has been scrapped in favor of a genuinely workable skill system in which natural ability is actually supplanted by skill as experience is gained. Skill use is resolved by rolling a d20 and adding your character's skill and any modifiers to beat a target number. It's quick, easy, and intuitive. This new system comes up short when it comes to combat, however. Skill in combat is still a measure mostly of level. As you increase in level, you automatically become better in combat. You can use feats, which are gained every 3rd level, to increase your skill with weapons slightly more quickly than

normal, but you can't choose to advance in combat skills more slowly.

The combat system is notable mostly for changing the way Armor Class works and the way critical hits work. Armor Class still starts at 10 and is still modified by your dexterity and armor, but now it counts upward. To hit someone, you need to roll higher than his Armor Class. Critical hits are now varied depending on the weapon. Some weapons get critical strikes on only a natural 20, others on a 19 or 20, or on an 18, 19 or 20. A critical hit might do double or triple damage, depending on the weapon, making it possible to create more meaningful differences between weapons. The concept that the best way to avoid being hit is to put on the heaviest armor you can find is still implicit in the system, as is the idea that a character gains hit points with experience and can keep fighting at full strength until he's dying. Also, the Star Wars design team seems to have infected the D&D design team; in the weapons list there's not only a two-bladed sword, like Darth Maul's lightsaber, there's also a two-bladed axe that looks like a Klingon weapon, a two-headed flail that looks like a good way to hurt yourself badly, and a hammer with a pick on the other end that looks like when you swing the hammer part at someone you'll bury the pick part of the thing in your own wrist.

The number of spells that can be cast by wizards has been increased, although the old problem of spell memorization has not been fixed so much as hand-waved away. In older editions of *AD&D*, a wizard had to plan ahead to memorize spells that, once cast, were forgotten. Now memorization has been replaced with preparation. In essence, you start casting the spell beforehand, but then stop most of the way through and wait until you need it to fire it off to finish casting. This solves neither the problem of needing to guess which spells you will need later nor the restriction on the number of spells cast per day (is it possible to bar the door and wait until the wizard prepares or memorizes Magic Missle again?). By contrast, sorcerors, who cast the same spells, do not prepare their spells beforehand, yet take no more time to cast them. Clerics are able to drop prepared spells in favor of cure spells, but must still prepare spells beforehand. If divine spells are granted by the gods why do they need to be prepared like wizard spells, which supposedly operate on different principles?

At the end of the book is a small series of appendices talking about awarding experience, creating magic items, and giving a small list of monsters. It was nice of WotC to include some rules for actually playing the game, since their business plan, which has always been incomprehensible to me, calls for them to not actually release the real rules on such things until September and October. It would have been nicer if they had included rules that were known to be the finished product, rather than including a disclaimer that the rules are merely summaries of the actual rules, which are subject to change in between the release of the *Player's Handbook* and the *Dungeon Master's Guide* anyway. There is also a CD-ROM which contains a character generation program. It's fun to play with, but fairly buggy, and I've had no luck trying to download the patch from WotC's website. It's only a demo anyway, with the real version to be released in 2001.

Dungeons and Dragons, in all its incarnations, has always had a reputation as a hack-and-slash game, substituting greater bonuses to hit for roleplaying. This reputation is not necessarily undeserved, nor is it refuted in this new edition. Roleplaying beyond the level of "I am Krunk the Barbarian" is not supported in the *Player's Handbook*. This is not to say that it's not possible to really get into character playing *D&D*, only that it's not supported. Instead of well over 200 pages of lists of cool abilities and spells and weapons to give your character, some space could have been devoted to creating a three-dimensional character or how to be a good player. Chapter 6, which is devoted to describing your character, is mostly about alignments, the gods of Greyhawk and how to determine a character's height, weight, and age.

Yes, the gods of Greyhawk are in the chapter on describing your character. Greyhawk is once again going to be the default setting for *D&D*, but I think this was an unnecessary inclusion in the *Player's Handbook*. There is no other setting information, but great care is taken to explain which god the bard class reveres and who the gnomes worship and on and on. The space used for that could have been used for an introduction to roleplaying for beginners or a section on how to tell Mom that you're not worshipping the mangoat. All we get in the way of an introduction to roleplaying is a few sentences after the character creation summary saying some people in the game play characters, one person is the gamemaster, and a list of around a dozen things you might do in the game. As a game which is intended to bring new players into the hobby, with less than a quarter of a page devoted to explaining roleplaying and a couple of hundred pages devoted just to character creation, *D&D 3rd Edition* isn't doing much to make them feel welcome.

The goal of the latest edition of **Dungeons & Dragons** is to both draw new players into the hobby and draw gamers who have strayed from **D&D** over the years back to the game. It's certainly good enough that disillusioned ex-**D&D** players might want to take a look at it. For new gamers the only thing going for it is the name and Hasbro's advertising money.

Compare **D&D 3rd Edition** to two other games I'd recommend for beginning gamers, **Feng Shui** and **Fading Suns**. **D&D 3rd Edition** requires at least one player, the GM, to get three books at $20 each for the next three months. **Feng Shui** and **Fading Suns** need only one book, priced at $30 or $35, respectively. Character creation for **D&D 3rd Edition** is a lengthy process, encompassing hundreds of pages of information. **Feng Shui** uses a template system that can get players ready to play in as little as five minutes. **Fading Suns** has a complex system for character creation, but also incorporates a series of templates that can generate a complete character with a believable history in twenty or thirty minutes. **Fading Suns** and **Feng Shui** both have detailed settings in the core rulebook. **Dungeons & Dragons** has a default setting, but it's not explained in the **PHB** beyond the gods of Greyhawk. **Dungeons & Dragons** may have a lower entry cost for the player, with the PHB costing only $20 as opposed to the higher price tags for games like **Feng Shui** or **Fading Suns**, but experience has shown that few **D&D** players settle for just the **Player's Handbook**. Everyone I know who plays **AD&D** has at least the three core books, and usually more. Once you add in the inevitable game world supplements, **D&D 3rd Edition**'s entry cost will be no less than any other game; it will just take longer to buy the essentials.

I've quipped before that **D&D 3rd Edition** would be the best game of 1987. I may revise the statement, but not the underlying sentiment. **D&D 3rd Edition** is the best game made to date that still uses concepts like class, level and alignment. It's not the best game that could be made with those concepts, however. More attention could have been paid to roleplaying and less to gaining new powers. As it stands, **D&D** has a more advanced system than ever, and it's a huge leap forward from **AD&D 2nd Edition**, but it can't seem to escape its wargaming roots.

-- Kevin Mowery

Saints Preserve Us!

by James Maliszewski

Art by Michael Harmon

The Middle Ages remain a popular setting for fantasy roleplaying games in part because they present a world that is both familiar and alien. While the people and the landscapes are recognizable to us, much of the worldview is not. Nowhere is this more evident than in matters of religion. The Middle Ages were paradoxically a time of both great piety and great superstition.

These two conflicting elements come together powerfully in popular devotions to the saints. To the medieval mind, directly approaching an individual of higher station than oneself (like a king or a nobleman) was unthinkable. Intercessors and mediators were thus a common element of their society. The saints played the same role with regard to God. In some cases, the cults of certain saints almost became religions in themselves!

For that reason, the cults of the saints should hold great interest for anyone running a game set in the Middle Ages, or in a medieval derived setting. This article presents basic information on a half dozen of the most popular saints of the Middle Ages. For the most part, these saints no longer occupy as prominent a place in the spiritual imagination as they did in medieval times. In the case of four of them, the Church no longer even recognizes the saints as historical personages. However, as noted above, this is part of the charm of the period: experiencing a world that's at once familiar and alien. As these saints show, the Middle Ages were a time with concerns often different from our own.

Included with each saint is a short adventure seed employing the accompanying information. The seeds are purposefully generic, so as to allow a Game Master to employ them in the game of his choosing, whether it be *Ars Magica*, *Pendragon*, *Vampire: The Dark Ages*, *GURPS Fantasy*, or another game.

Barbara

Barbara was a virgin and martyr. Veneration of her was common from the seventh century onward. At about this date there were in existence legendary Acts of her martyrdom which were inserted in the collection of Symeon Metaphrastes and were used as well by the authors of the enlarged martyrologies composed during the ninth century in Western Europe. According to these narratives, Barbara was the daughter of a wealthy pagan named Dioscorus. Dioscurus kept Barbara locked in a tower to protect her fom the outside world. Despite this, many young men wished to marry her, but she rebuffed them all.

Before going on a journey, Dioscurus commanded that a bathhouse be erected for her use near her tower. During his absence Barbara had three windows put in it -- in honor of the Holy Trinity -- instead of the two originally intended. When her father returned, she pronounced herself a Christian. Greatly upset, her father brought her before the prefect of the province, Martinianus, who cruelly tortured her and condemned her to death by beheading. Dioscurus himself carried out the death-sentence, but in punishment he was struck by lightning on the way home and his body consumed. Another Christian named Juliana suffered the death of a martyr along with Barbara. A pious man called Valentinus buried the bodies of both martyrs. At their grave, the sick were healed and the pilgrims who came to pray received aid and consolation.

The traditions vary as to the place of martyrdom. Some legends make Heliopolis in Egypt the site of the martyrdom, while other accounts give Nicomedia, Rome, or Tuscany. In any case, it is certain that before the ninth century she was venerated both in the East and in the West, and was very popular with the common people, especially in France. The legend that her father was struck by lightning caused her to be regarded as the patron saint in time of danger from

thunderstorms and fire and -- by analogy -- as the protector of gunners and miners. She was also called upon as intercessor to assure the receiving of the Sacraments of Penance and Holy Eucharist at the hour of death.

In the Greek and Roman calendars, her feast falls on December 4th, while the martyrologies on the ninth century place it on December 16th. St. Barbara has often been depicted in art; she is usually represented standing in a tower with three windows, carrying the palm of a martyr in her hand. Often she also holds a chalice and a host. In other representations, cannons can be found near her as well.

Adventure Seed: Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition

The characters make the acquaintance of an artillerist seeking to improve the design of his cannons. He enlists the characters' aid in his researches -- including "hands on" tests. However, the artillerist possesses a relic of St. Barbara, which he believes will protect the characters from harm. Whether it will actually do so and the extent of his researches are best determined by the GM.

Catherine of Alexandria

Catherine was a virgin and martyr whose feast is celebrated in the Western church (and in some Eastern churches) on November 25th. Born to noble parents and well-educated, at the age of eighteen Catherine presented herself to the Roman emperor Maximinus, whom she censured for his persecution of Christians. Astounded at the her audacity, Maximinus detained her in his palace and summoned philosophers to use their sophistry to refute Catherine's arguments. Nevertheless, the young woman emerged victorious after hours of debate.

Several of the philosophers were impressed with her words, declared themselves Christians, and were immediately executed. Furious, Maximinus ordered Catherine scourged and then imprisoned her. Meanwhile, the empress, eager to see Catherine, went with Porphyry, commander of the legions, to visit her in prison. They, too, were converted by her words and executed by Maximinus. While in captivity, Catherine converted many others as well. The emperor ordered her put to death on the wheel, but, at her touch, the instrument of torture was miraculously destroyed. Now enraged beyond all measure, Maximinus could take no more. She was beheaded and milk flowed from her severed neck instead of blood. God sent angels to carry her body to Mount Sinai where a church and monastery would later be built in her name.

One of the "Fourteen Holy Helpers," Catherine was regularly praised by preachers and lauded by poets. In many countries her feast was celebrated with great solemnity. Manual labor was forbidden and great numbers of people attended her devotions. In several dioceses of France, her feast was considered a holy day of obligation. The splendor of its liturgies eclipsed that of the feasts of even some of the Apostles! Innumerable chapels were given to her and her statue was found in nearly all churches, including a wheel, the instrument of her torture. St. Catherine became the patron of young women, female students, and nurses.

The spiked wheel became St. Catherine's symbol. Thus, millers, spinners and wheelwrights placed themselves under her patronage. Because she triumphed against the sophists in debate, theologians, apologists, pulpit orators, and philosophers sought her intercession. Before studying, writing, or preaching, they asked her to illuminate their minds, guide their pens, and impart eloquence to their words. Devotion to St. Catherine, which assumed great popularity in Europe due to efforts of the Crusaders, received additional celebrity in France at the beginning of the fifteenth century. At that time, she appeared to Joan of Arc and, together with St. Margaret, had been divinely appointed Joan's spiritual adviser.

Adventure Seed: Catherine's Daughter

Word spreads of a remarkably thoughtful and intelligent young nobleman, who has begun to impress the local intelligentsia with her erudition. Although she is probably just a well-educated lady, some whisper that St. Catherine herself has provided her with divine illumination for a great task -- whatever that task may be. The characters may be sent by the Church to investigate these tales or might be persuaded to join in the young woman's undertaking.

Julian the Hospitaller

Although completely mythical, Julian was a very popular saint in the Middle Ages. His legend describes him as a young nobleman. One day, while hunting, he came upon a hart that said, "You are hunting me, but you will kill your father and mother." To avoid this dire fate, he fled his country and entered the service of a foreign king. So successful was Julian that the king knighted him and gave him a rich widow in marriage.

Julian's mother and father eventually sought him out and came to his home in the foreign land. When they did so, Julian was away from his home, but his wife welcomed them with open arms. She even offered them her bed in which to sleep. Julian returned the next day and entered his bedroom. Upon seeing a man and a woman asleep in his bed, he assumed his wife had committed adultery. He then killed both his mother and father while they slept.

Soon thereafter, Julian met his wife and realized he had made a grave error. Overcome with grief, he sold his possessions and left the foreign country, along with his wife. In time, he came to a river crossing and used his wealth to build a hospital for the poor. One day, Julian rescued a traveler nearly dead with cold and offered him his own bed in which to recover. The traveler died and Julian saw him ascend into heaven, saying, "Julian, Our Lord has sent me to you and He has accepted your penance." At that, both Julian and his wife died as well.

Many hospitals were dedicated to his honor, particularly in the Netherlands. He became known as the patron of innkeepers, boatmen, and travelers. Many trade guilds held him in high regard and created works of art in his memory. The cathedrals of both Rouen and Chartres include magnificent stained glass windows depicting his legend.

Adventure Seed: Hôtel-Dieu

The characters find themselves in dire need of assistance and turn to a hospital dedicated to St. Julian. While there, they may learn more of his legend and those who've devoted their lives to the care of the poor. This seed provides a nice counterpoint to the "oppressive Church" that is common in many settings.

Margaret of Antioch

Like both Barbara and Catherine, Margaret is a virgin and martyr. She is also sometimes called Marina, especially in the East. Living in Antioch, her father was a pagan priest. Margaret's mother died soon after her birth and a pious woman who lived outside the city nursed her. Under her nurse's influence, Margaret became a Christian, resulting in her father's disowning her. She then went to live with her nurse in the countryside.

One day, while watching the flocks of her adopted mother, Olybrius, governor of Antioch, caught sight of her and was moved by her beauty. Olybrius then sought to make Margaret his wife, but to no avail. When neither flattery nor threats of punishment convinced her, the governor had her brought before him at Antioch. Threatened with death unless she renounced the Christian faith, Margaret refused to venerate pagan idols. Olybrius then ordered her burned, but the flames failed to harm her. She was then bound hand and foot and thrown into a cauldron of boiling water, but her prayers broke the bonds and she escaped without injury. She was even swallowed by a dragon, but the creature's belly burst open, allowing her to escape. Finally, Olybrius ordered her beheaded.

The Eastern Church honors Margaret under the name Marina on July 13th, while the West does so on July 20th. St. Margaret is represented in art either as a shepherdess or as leading a chained dragon. In both cases, she frequently carries a little cross or girdle in her hand, or stands by cauldron like the one into which she was plunged. Relics said to belong to the saint are venerated in many parts of Europe, including Rome, Montefalcone, Brussels, Bruges, Paris, Froidmont, and Troyes. Ironically, this virgin was widely venerated as a special patron of pregnant women. In addition, numerous promises were associated with her. One such promise states that those who invoke her on their deathbeds will escape the clutches of demons. These and similar promises contributed greatly to her popularity.

Adventure Seed: Crown of Glory

The characters encounter a man obsessed with writing a new history of St. Margaret's martyrdom. A young and creative fellow, he believes that, by doing so, he will receive an unfading crown of glory in heaven -- as promised by the saint herself. The man might ask the characters to aid him in some way or his family might ask them to dissuade him from his obsession.

Martin of Tours

Martin was born at Sabaria, Pannonia (Hungary), around 316. In his early years, he accompanied his father, a military tribune, on his expeditions. When Martin reached adolescence, he enrolled in the Roman army. Consequently, Martin was greatly attracted to Christianity, which had been in favor among soldiers since the conversion of the emperor Constantine. His regiment was sent to Amiens in Gaul, and this town became the scene of the celebrated legend of the cloak. At the gates of the city, one very cold day, Martin met a shivering and half-naked beggar. Moved with compassion, he divided his coat into two parts and gave one to the poor man. The part kept by himself became a famous relic preserved in the oratory of the Frankish kings under the name of "St. Martin's cloak" (cappella Sancti Martini) and is the origin of the word "chapel." Martin, who was still only a catechumen, soon received baptism, and was a little later freed from military service.

Saints Preserve Us!

He hastened to Poitiers to join the disciples of St. Hilary, a bishop whose reputation as a theologian was already passing beyond the frontiers of Gaul. Desiring to see his parents again, he returned to Lombardy across the Alps. The inhabitants of this region were Arians and were bitterly hostile towards Catholicism. Thus, Martin, who did not conceal his faith, was very badly treated by order of Bishop Auxentius of Milan, the leader of the heretical sect in Italy. Martin desired to return to Gaul. However, upon learning the Arians troubled that province as well and had even exiled Hilary to the East, he sought shelter on the island of Gallinaria in the Tyrrhenian Sea.

Once Martin learned an imperial decree had authorized Hilary to return to Gaul, he joined him in Poitiers in 361. From Hilary, he obtained permission to again take up the solitary life that he had adopted in Gallinaria. Many others soon followed his example, forming a monastic community around him. This community later became the celebrated Benedictine Abbey of Ligugé. Martin remained there about ten years, but often left to preach in the central and western parts of Gaul. The memory of these apostolic journeys survived throughout the Middle Ages in the numerous local legends of which Martin is the hero and which indicate roughly the routes he followed.

When St. Lidorius, second Bishop of Tours, died in 371 or 372, the clergy of that city wanted Martin to replace him. However, Martin rejected that high office. Thus it was necessary to trick him to overcome his resistance. A certain Rusticius, a rich citizen of Tours, went and begged Martin to minister to his dying wife and prepare her for death. Without any suspicions, Martin gave in to his entreaty and accompanied him. Hardly had he entered the city when, in spite of the opposition of ecclesiastical dignitaries, popular acclamation made him become bishop of Tours.

Consecrated on July 4th, Martin did not, however, change his way of life. Fleeing the distractions of Tours, he settled in a small cell a short distance from city. Some other hermits joined him there, and thus was gradually formed a new monastery, which surpassed that of Ligugé, as is indicated by the name, Marmoutier (Majus Monasterium), which it has kept to our own day. Even so, he often left his diocese when he thought he might do some good. He even went to Trier, where the emperors had established their residence, to plead the interests of the Church or to ask pardon for some condemned person.

After a final visit to Rome, Martin went to Candes, a religious center in his diocese, where he was attacked by a malady that ended his life. Carried into the presbytery of the church, he died there in 397. The Church in France has always considered Martin one of the greatest saints, and hagiographers have recorded many miracles due to his intercession -- both while he was living and after his death. His cult was very popular throughout the Middle Ages. His body, taken to Tours, was enclosed in a stone sarcophagus, above which his successors built first a simple chapel and later a basilica. A larger basilica was constructed in 1014, which burned down in 1230 only to be rebuilt on a still larger scale. This sanctuary was a great center of pilgrimages. On November 11th, the feast of St. Martin is solemnly celebrated in this church in the presence of a large number of the faithful of Tours and other cities and villages of the diocese.

Adventure Seed: Saint-Chappelle

Whatever happened to the other part of Saint Martin's cloak? Some legends claim the poor man to whom he gave it was Christ in disguise. Others make him out to be a mere mortal. If the latter is true, the discovery of the relic might have profound religious significance -- especially to one of the many French towns that seeks to become a pilgrimage site associated with the saint.

Nicholas of Myra

Nicholas (also called Nicholas of Bari) was bishop of Myra in Asia Minor. Though he is one of the most popular saints in the East as well as the West, there is little historically certain about him except that he was a bishop in the fourth century. In the Middle Ages, he was believed to have been born at Parara, a city of Lycia. In his youth, he made a pilgrimage to Egypt and Palestine. Shortly after his return, he became Bishop of Myra. Nicholas was cast into prison during the persecution of Diocletian, but was released after the accession of Constantine, and was present at the Council of Nicea. In 1087, Italian merchants stole his body from Myra, bringing it to Bari in Italy.

The numerous miracles St. Nicholas was said to have wrought, both before and after his death, are outgrowths of a long tradition. There is reason to doubt his presence at Nicea, since his name is not mentioned in any of the old lists of bishops that attended this council. His cult in the Greek Church is old and especially popular in Russia.

As early as the sixth century the Byzantine emperor Justinian I built a church in his honor at Constantinople, and his name occurs in the liturgy ascribed to St. John Chrysostom. In Italy, his cult began with the translation of his relics to Bari. In Germany, it began during the reign of Otto II, probably because his wife Theophana was Greek. Over the centuries, St. Nicholas has not lessened in popularity. The following places honor him as patron: Greece, Russia, the Kingdom of Naples, Sicily, Lorraine, the Diocese of Liège, many cities in Italy, Germany, Austria and Belgium, as well as Campen in the Netherlands, Corfu in Greece, Freiburg in Switzerland and Moscow in Russia.

St. Nicholas had a great reputation as a thaumaturge, or "wonder worker." His alleged miracles are many, including the saving of three girls from a life of prostitution and the raising from the dead of three boys murdered by a butcher. He is the patron of children, sailors, unmarried girls, merchants, pawnbrokers, apothecaries, and perfume makers. In Germany, Switzerland and the Netherlands, he is considered the secret purveyor of gifts to children on 6 December, the day on which the Church celebrates his feast. His relics are still preserved in the church of San Nicola in Bari. An oily substance, known as the "manna of St. Nicholas," which is highly valued for its medicinal powers, is said to flow from them.

Adventure Seed: Divine Magic

In a setting in which magic is real, St. Nicholas might be viewed as the prototypical Christian mage. Characters seeking to emulate him might visit sites associated with the bishop in hopes of gaining his patronage. Alternately, evil-doers might attempt to obtain his relics for less noble reasons.

Conclusions

These six saints just scratch the surface of medieval popular religion. However, each illustrates nicely how the cults of the saints add a great deal to historical fantasy roleplaying games -- in terms of color, authenticity, and story possibilities. The saints played a central role in medieval religion; they should do the same in medieval fantasy campaigns.

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by Joseph Goodman

Dynamite Bob has nerves of steel. Never mind that he's low down and good for nothing. He's a regular at the jailhouse and the father of 8 children in 9 counties (the train was moving at the time). But he's got nerves of steel, which is why they call him Dynamite Bob.

He spends his working hours contracted out to the mining companies. No one is exactly sure what he does in his spare time, but it's a proven fact he's blown up his barn four times now. Some people say it's just an excuse for a social event, seeing as how nobody in town would miss a barn raising. Others think something fishy is going on, but so far they don't have any proof.

If they'd just stay up a little later than usual tonight they'd have all the proof they could ever want. Dynamite Bob has been up to no good, in an especially dangerous sort of way. He's been experimenting with combinations of nitroglycerine and ghost rock, which with the right additives have so far produced dynamite sticks far more explosive than anything else in use. Worst of all, he's been selling these super-sticks to Black River.

Tonight a small cadre of Black River troops is on its way to pick up the latest shipment of dynamite. Trouble is, someone else got word of the deal and wants to stop the delivery. And Dynamite Bob is stuck in the middle.

Troops: The 200 point Black River force can be freely designed by the player as long as it includes at least two Demolitionists. The opposing force, also 200 points, can be from any other railway; it is advised that a few cannons be included, just for the booms. The only restriction is that the Bushwack ability may not be used by either force.

Dynamite Bob is also involved in the fight, and will be controlled by both players as described below.

Setup: The battle takes place under a full moon on Dynamite Bob's property. The house, barn, and sheds are set up in the center of the table, surrounded by a generous supply of barrels, crates, and oblivious livestock that can be used for cover.

Dynamite Bob

Deployment: Dynamite Bob begins outside the barn and the two opposing forces are set up along opposite edges.

Dynamite Bob: Dynamite Bob is confused as a dog in a fire hydrant factory. The night was scheduled to begin with a simple commercial exchange and now he has all sorts of trouble in his front yard.

Dynamite Bob isn't too happy about his property getting shot up. He's gone plumb loco (not that he was ever that

straight-shootin' to start with). Treat him as a gunman with a pistol and an unlimited supply of super-dooper dynamite sticks that cause twice the usual amount of damage (4d8). Each turn he should be dealt an action card as usual. On Spades or Clubs the Black River player controls him for this turn; on diamonds or hearts the other player controls him.

Troops killed by Bob do not yield bounty points for either side.

One more rule is suggested which makes the game a lot more fun. If you allow players to shoot at Bob, his role in the game ends real fast. So it is recommended that neither player be allowed to target Bob until Bob has attacked that player's troops.

The Buildings: Any model that ends an action segment within any building will have an unlimited supply of normal dynamite sticks for the rest of the game.

If the Boom! template so much as touches the barn, roll a d6. On a 4 or higher the barn blows up. Models inside the barn take 2d12 damage. Models within 3" of the barn edges take 2d8 damage. The resulting rubble covers the area of the barn and provides hard cover.

The same applies to the sheds and house but not quite so powerfully. They only blow if you roll a 6 on a d6.

One more house rule is advised, just to keep the game in line with the general principle of "You can't hit the broadside of a barn!" Any troop targeting a building will hit on any role except a natural 1.

Bonus: None.

Bounty Points: This battle doesn't end until one side is dead all the way around. There ain't no cavalry showing up in these parts. Therefore, bounty points are used exclusively for purchasing fate chips.

Multiple Players: This is a lot more fun with Dynamite Bob irrationally livid, but if there is a third player he could be given control of ol' D.B.

by Hans Rancke-Madsen

Art by Allen Nunisby

This adventure takes place in the Spinward Marches in the year 1117. It can start on any planet with a fair amount of interstellar traffic. The PCs are approached by a human male (of that indeterminate mixture of races sometimes referred to as "Imperial") with an apparent age of around 50. He gives the name of Solomon Thorov and offers them a high-paying job of, frankly, considerable risk. The exact approach and the negotiations must be adjusted by the GM to suit the players; Thorov won't go into too much detail until he is fairly confident that the PCs will take the job.

The Job

Thirty-three years ago, in 1084, during the 4th Frontier War, the Zhodani invaded Grant. At the time Grant was a thriving world mostly populated by Imperial humans and assimilated Vargr. During the ensuing battle the Zhodani released a biological warfare agent that caused the death of untold millions and forced the Imperial Navy to evacuate the survivors. After the war the IN began using the now-empty system for testing planetary bombardment weapons and put the whole system under interdict. Thorov represents a commercial organisation of considerable means (ie. a megacorporation) that suspects that the germ or virus would not have been tailored to last forever. If this is true and if it can be proved, the organisation can squash any charges arising from the illegal entry into an interdicted system. The IN would be embarrased over having used a Terran-prime planet for bombardment tests and would be eager to cooperate. (By the same token, however, the IN would want to stop any investigations before they bore fruit if they learned of them too soon.) Furthermore, the organization would be very favorably situated to gain ownership of Grant, which would be worth many billions.

Thorov offers each PC Cr100,000 just for going to the planet and test the theory, regardless of results. Should the expedition eventually lead to the opening of Grant under the auspices of the corporation, each PC would further recieve a share in the venture worth Cr1,000,000. If they are caught and imprisoned, they will each recieve Cr25,000 per year they serve. Any human and Vargr PCs will additionally recieve another Cr100,000, since they will be at extra risk if the BW agent turns out to be active still. Thorov explains that the expedition will carry several terrestial test animals, including a chimpanzee, and makes it plain that if the test animals survive exposure to the planetary air, the PCs are expected to risk it too; live survivors will be of great value to the corporation.

Through unspecified sources Thorov is aware of the IN deployment schedules for Grant for the next few months and knows of a window of opportunity during which all IN vessels in the system will be on maneuvers in the outer asteroid belt. Thorov will furnish a small 200 T Free Trader and undertake to smuggle the PCs down on the planet. They will

be detected by surveillance sattelites, but they should have a minimum of 8 days to conduct their tests and get away before a navy ship can get there.

A library data check will produce the following information:

1607 Grant (Imperial) Red Zone

Starport: Class 0.
Diameter: 6,339 miles (10,200 km). *Atmosphere:* Standard oxygen-nitrogen. *Surface Water:* 41%. *Climate:* Normal. *Population:* No permanent residents. *Government:* None. *Control Rating:* None. *TL:* None.

Grant was a thriving world until it was depoplatated by a bio-warfare agent during the 4th Frontier War and turned into a naval test area for planetary bombardment weapons. It is rumored that some non-humans were left behind in the evacuation and that some still survive. The navy categorically denies this. The entire system is under interdict.

Referee's Information

As usual, things are not exactly as they appear. The Zhodani were not responsible for the release of Artificial Pathogen R-89-Y-9378, Series 8495; at least not directly. Imperial Research Station Beta, at that time located on Grant, was ostensibly dedicated to agricultural research; secretly a part of it was engaged in biological warfare research for the IN. A Zhodani strike team captured the research station and the local IN commandant panicked. In the ensuing battle security was breached and AP R-89-Y-9378/8495, an artificial organism lethal to Earth-descended mammals, was released into the air. Within a week millions had died; within a month the figure rose to tens of millions, not all from the pathogen but also from the ensuing panic and break-down of society; and within a year it had become hundreds of millions. The Navy did its best to evacuate the population, but the logistics of space travel and the necessity of quarantining the rescuees made it impossible to save more than a few tens of thousands humans and Vargr. Another few thousands belonging to other races did survive (though many had been killed in riots) and were likewise evacuated. The ensuing investigation was complicated by the fact that the covert research was a secret even from most of the Imperial Navy. Only a small segment of it, a since-defunct "Department of Dirty Tricks," knew of it and did their best to cover up. The best they could do was to get the planet completely evacuated, prevent an on-site investigation, and get the system temporarily interdicted. They were unable to arrange for the destruction of the on-planet evidence and eventually had to settle for getting the system made a test area for planetary bombardment weapons.

The patron could be any one of a number of different persons. The GM should select one of the options below and select one of the other options to represent a rival expedition (or more than one if he likes complications).

- A representative of a megacorporation, just as he represented himself. Note that this dosen't mean that the rival couldn't be the representative of another megacorporation.
- A Zhodani nobleman in disguise. Knowing for a fact that the Zhodani are not responsible for the terrible tragedy, he wants to expose the truth and remove the onus of genocide from his people. Or he may want to get his hand on the research material and take it back to the Consulate.
- The Count of Grant, a now-empty, but still existing, title borne by the son of the former count who died 33 years ago. The son was serving in the Navy at the time and thus survived. He is now a retired rear admiral and is tracking down some very vague rumors. He actually has a theoretical right to be on Grant and may be able to save his hirelings from charges of breaking the Interdict if they are caught after the fact, although he does not have the clout to flout the Interdict openly.
- A former member of the Exotic Inventions Evaluation Board, the aforementioned 'Department of Dirty Tricks,' now a retired vice admiral. Alarmed by echoes of inquiries into the IN ship deployment schedule for Grant or the nosings of a pesky journalist or rumors of the count's plans or the recent declassification of certain naval records, he has finally made up his mind to go to Grant and destroy all remaining evidence.

Other possibilities include a journalist on the track of a good story or a naval historian tracking down leads from some declassified papers. In these cases the patron would propably not offer so much money and if he did he could not pay up afterwards; the GM must adjust the initial job offer as appropiate. If the patron does represent a megacorporation then all promises will be kept; if he is on his own, the up-front money is propably all he can afford unless he has a very substantial private income.

Down on Grant

The PCs should constitute about half the expedition; the other half should be mostly scientific types with perhaps one or two bodyguards or faithful retainers for the patron. The patron himself will captain the ship. Once safely arrived on the planet he will turn his scientists loose on the biological tests and ask the PCs to locate the remains of the former Research Station Beta. (He won't make a point of it unless pressed, but he is the only one who knows the access codes to the ship's computer, and once down on the planet the PCs only options are to do as he says or hitch a ride with a passing Imperial Navy patrol.)

Grant is a medium-sized, Earth-like planet with standard atmosphere and 41% surface water. Strictly speaking the atmosphere ought to be coded as tainted, but since no IISS ship has been allowed access to Grant since the accident, the matter has been forgotten.

Conditions on Grant are downright eerie. Only bones remain of the many millions who died here thirty-three years ago. Dotted across the surface are areas that have been turned into lunar landscapes by planetary bombardments. The total percentage is not very large, but the total devastation is as disturbing in its own way as the empty cities are in theirs, and made even more poignant by the lush countryside that surrounds them. This was a beautiful, vibrant planet once.

The average tech level of Grant before the tragedy was 11. Three decades of neglect has caused many buildings and artifacts to crumble and decay, but some remain in reasonable order. About 10% of buildings and artifacts are in sufficiently good shape to require only a minimum of care to function properly (though the absence of power will preclude a number of functions no matter what). Another 20-30% may be restored with varying degree of effort. Much depends on the degree of exposure to the elements, of course. If in doubt, roll on the table below.

Die roll (2D)	Condition
7-	Broken beyond repair.
8	Major repairs needed. (1D days of work with special tools)
9	Medium repairs needed. (1D hours with adequate tools)
10	Minor repairs needed. (1D*10 minutes with improvised tools)
11	Minor adjustments needed. (1D minutes of fiddling)
12	Working, assuming any necessary power or loads are available.
13	Fully operational. (charged batteries or full load if appropiate)
14+	Pristine; could be sold as new.

DMs: Completely exposed to the elements: -3; partly exposed: -1; specifically protected: +1 to +3; sturdy equipment/construction: +1 to +3; particularly sensitive equipment/flimsy construction: -1 to -3.

Characters with an acquisitive streak will be able to find many nice trinkets left behind with the bones. The referee could include some grisly finds of mummified remains of hapless victims to suit the ghoulish nature of such activities.

Of special interest are the local computers. None of them are active, of course, and many of them never will be again. Almost all data storage was non-volatile, however, so with some ingenuity the PCs should be able to get any information they need. Eaxmining news bulletins from the first days of the epedemic, before everything broke down, would allow them to locate the epicenter. Another way to find the research station is to examine the records of the

Count of Grant's office or the Imperial Navy base (The patron can supply then-current Imperial passwords, both civilian and military). Remember that neither the Count nor the port admiral knew of the biological research part of RS Beta, but they did know of the station's existence and location. If all else fails, the PCs can spot the rival expedition and track it to the station.

The exact events on planet will depend on the particular roles the GM selects for the patron and for the rival expedition(s). Here are three possible complications:

* * *

The test animals will thrive in the beginning. This is logical, given the theory that the BW agent was a fully developed product used by the Zhodani; it's almost unbelievable that they would use something like that and not make sure that it would have a built-in expiration date. On the other hand, it is also difficult to believe that they would use something like that in the first place and that it would have had a programmed life of over a year, which is the current theory. Unfortunately the theory is wrong and AP R-89-Y-9378/8495 was not fully perfected. Over the years it has decreased considerably in virulence, but there are still patches of a mutated version lurking here and there. If the the decision is made to ditch the protective suits, the GM have three options: He can decide that someone will catch the disease, he can leave it up to a daily die roll for each character, or he can decide that no one catches anything.

If someone does catch the pathogen, he will initially feel no ill effects except for a slight fever. The expedition's scientists are alert for just such an incident, however, and tests will quickly establish that both he and whoever he has been in contact with is affected. The pathogen turns out to be an artificial construction combining the worst elements of germs and viruses and though the mutation evidently works a lot slower than the original, the infected persons are still under a death sentence in a few weeks.

Three possibilities of survival exists: finding a still active serum that will effect a cure in the research station, finding detailed specifications of the pathogen in the research station and have a major research lab find a cure (which would be a race against time), or treatment with massive doses of metabolics at a major hospital (which would still require a survival roll against HT).

* * *

The Scouts believe that a number of non-human/non-Vargr citizens were driven into hiding by the hysterical persecutions caused by the epidemic and left behind in the evacuation. (The Navy vehemently denied this.) How many (if any) were in fact left behind, and how many of those survive after thirty-three years is a matter of pure conjecture. The Scouts estimate that as many as twenty may still be alive. The GM may wish to introduce one of these survivors. After thirty-three years any such is bound to have been affected mentally. A crazy, but cunning, homicidal old Aslan or a berserk Virushi can liven up any otherwise dull day. . .

* * *

Eventually the Imperial Navy will enter the scene. The GM should throw a die each day after the 8th with a 50/50 chance that a patrol vessel will arrive in orbit. They will have observed how many ships have set down on the planet, but will not know exactly where they went down. They will start looking immediately, and surface travel by grav vehicle will become hazardous. As time goes by more and more ships will arrive (50% chance per day of another ship). Eventually they will find the ships unless they are completely powered down. As long as there is only one ship on patrol there's a good chance of waiting until it is on the other side of the planet and making a run for the 100 diameter limit and an even better chance of at least reaching the 10 diameter limit; if even one more ship arrive the chances go down drastically.

Future Developments

Whether any of the expeditions are caught by the Navy or not, the stir made by the affair will cause a reevaluation of the interdict. In 1119 it is lifted. On the same day, to everybody's surprise, the Scouts, backed by an order from Grand

Princess Iphegenia, impose a new interdict of their own on the planet itself. No explanation is forthcoming, but a few months later the Scouts set up a small orbital base to monitor the world. If the PCs have earned shares in a prospective "Grant Venture," they may be tempted to try and find out what secret agenda the Scouts are pursuing.

Pyramid Review

Unexpected Allies (for Legend of the Five Rings RPG)

Published by [AEG](#)

Compiled by Patrick Kapera and Ree Soesbee

$19.95, 128 pages

When I first picked up *Unexpected Allies*, I thought that it would merely be a collection of NPCs for the *Legend of the Five Rings RPG*. I was glad to be wrong. Starting off with a short story, "A Dark Path's Beginning," that helps give the GM a feel for the alien soil of Rogukan, the book breaks into methods for crafting villains for the *L5R* game.

This section not only covers crafting villains and how to portray them, but discusses the role of allies as well. While some of the advice is ingrained into the bones of older GMs, newer ones will find themselves nodding at the hidden nuggets of wisdom contained herein. How some foes may not be evil, but simply different, how honor, glory and loyalty may clash against one another as both friend and foe vie for the same object, and how to craft characters that the players will want to interact with.

For the game specifically, there are several new ancestors that players may take for the characters ranging from Akodo Samune, a brave bushi who protected the Emperor's children when Iuchiban invaded Otosan Uchi, to Otaku Kunami, a samurai-ko with amazing horse prowess.

There are tables for quick generation of quirks and motivations. How about a glutton who is a deep sleeper and is motivated by lust? Sounds like a modern politician to me!

One of the things I found out of place here was the section on Crime in the Emerald Empire. While I appreciate having this information in front of me, and was impressed that Koku and Spells can be forged, I had to ponder why this information wasn't saved for the upcoming *2nd Edition*, or the *GM's Survival Guide*. Ah well, perhaps the fine arts of piracy, kidnapping, and homicide could not wait.

Second two is the real meat of the book. There are forty-six characters for the GM to integrate into his campaign. Some are old hands that were first mentioned in the core *L5R* book, like the ronins Dairya and Ginawa, but most were fresh faces, at least to someone who doesn't play the card game!

The NPCs are broken down by clan: Crab, Crane, Dragon, Lion, Phoenix, Scorpion, Ronin, and Miscellaneous. The last group includes Hartuisun, a merchant of the Mantis Clan; Kitsune Kenjo, a member of the Fox Clan; and Shazaar, a Naga with belonging to the Chameleon Bloodline; among others. I was very pleased to see the inclusion of members of not only the Minor Clans, but also the Naga. The Ronin were a nice touch, but with the upcoming *Way of the Wolf* book coming out, perhaps they should have waited. After all, who knows what new advantages, disadvantages and techniques may make these ronin obsolete?

There are a nice range of character types here. While the majority of characters presented here are definitely warriors, there are a few spellcasters, including a Kuni Witch Hunter, and even a merchant and a heimin. It's good to see characters like Togashi Abekuni, an ise zumi, because these characters are rare and don't show up in play as often, and so players may be unaware of them. They make for a nice surprise when the party least expects it.

While I do not like the format, with each character taking up two sheets, I appreciate the ease of use. One page is a regular character sheet with all the important information filled out. Even the Mon of the clan is in the upper left hand corner. The second page has an illustration in the lower right hand corner, and the background story of the character. The only problem I have with some of the characters is that since I don't play the card game, I have no idea what the great destinies of some of the NPCs are. In some ways that's better, because it means I can do whatever I want with individuals like Dairya and Ginawa.

The art varies throughout the book. Some of the illustrations are right up there with the quality of the cover. The double page illo on 12-13 is one such picture. Other illustrations are merely adequate to convey the type of character being detailed.

Unexpected Allies is for two types of Game Masters. The first is the new GM who needs every edge he can get his hands on. The section on making NPCs is a useful tool that all GMs playing in the foreign lands of Rokugan should heed. The second type of GMs who needs this type of book are those without the time to detail out as many NPCs as they would like. The stats and types of characters can be easily reused with minimal fussing outside a name change.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Review, Take 2

Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams

300 pages and Demo CD-Rom; $19.95

Iron Ration(alization)s: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love D&D 3E

If you were to steal an experimental time machine and couldn't think of anything better to do with it than travel back to the summer of 1991 in order to annoy a younger me, here's a good opening line: "Hey, John! Guess what? In nine years you're going to be sending an angry letter to the editor of a gaming magazine begging him to let you defend *Dungeons & Dragons* against some guy who thinks its time has passed."

You see, August 1991 found me in thrall to White Wolf's recently released *Vampire: The Masquerade*. (Go easy on me, I was all of twenty years old.) An anthropology major and a serious Anne Rice geek, I was thrilled by the Wolfies' cutting-edge vision of roleplaying game as monomyth, as Jungian psychodrama, as story. "Fie on your musty old critical hit tables," I was wont to cry. "Give me emotional nuance and thematic intensity!"

Age works strange turns upon us all. And so it is, that nine years later, I found myself firing off an irritable e-mail to [Steven Marsh](#) demanding a chance to rebut *Pyramid*'s recent review of the ***[Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition Player's Handbook](#)***. Fortunately for my wife, who would otherwise be subjected to endless harangues on the subject, he acquiesced.

Here goes. Sorry, college-age me.

I have read and reread that review in the [August 18, 2000](#) issue of Pyramid, and cannot help but think it misses the point somewhat. Consider that review's closing sentence, which clucks disapprovingly that *D&D* "can't seem to escape its wargaming roots." Horrors!

While the roleplaying game genre has of late undergone a healthy explosion of formal experimentation, leading to products as diverse as the surreal, minimalist *Puppetland*, the freeform, imagist *Everway*, and the wonderfully gritty, postmodern *Unknown Armies*, there is no reason why good old high fantasy *Dungeons & Dragons*, with its old-school tactical approach to mapping and exploring dungeons before cleansing them of beasties terrible and strange, cannot still offer delights to both novice and experienced players.

Newsflash: not all roleplayers dislike "hack and slash," and adherence to wargaming roots isn't *de facto* a sin. If stat bonuses and levels and miniature dungeons peopled with miniature, um, people aren't your bag of chips, that's fine. But a reviewer's personal distaste for that style of play, however valid an opinion, doesn't mean that a roleplaying

game with wargaming elements is automatically a dud.

I'd especially like to address the issue of what enticements third-edition *Dungeons & Dragons* holds for newbie players, since *Pyramid*'s review specifically questions whether the new *Player's Handbook* has anything to offer them.

Not all new players are young sprouts, but a lot of them are. And for these preteen hobby-gamers, the revised *Dungeons & Dragons* is a lovely gateway product precisely because of its somewhat old-fashioned approach to RPG's, an approach which wears its board/war/card game roots on its sleeve. Consider, for instance, the enormous number of preteen and teenage players of Games Workshop's *Warhammer* line of games. Some of those require mathematical calculation and the memorization of complex rules of play fully as much as the new *Player's Handbook*. If you want a more two-dimensional example, *Magic: The Gathering*'s numerous exceptions and constantly mutating rules don't seem to trouble the pre-college set one whit. Sociologists and psychologists who study kids' play behavior have observed time and again that kids like rules, that their preferred play style is often highly legalistic and technical. I caught the *AD&D* bug at age eight, and while I didn't use every rule (who does, at any age?), I certainly didn't find the first edition of the game especially daunting. Furthermore, as *Pyramid*'s original review acknowledges, the third edition of *D&D* is considerably more straightforward than its ancestors.

A rules-heavy approach to roleplaying doesn't need to -- and shouldn't -- imply complex, convoluted mechanics, and the first two editions of *D&D* (or *AD&D*) have been rightly criticized on this score. In older iterations of the game, everything from the numerical rating of armor class, the number needed to hit a particular enemy target, the number needed to make a saving throw, and the number needed to open a stuck gate required a different set of calculations. This idiosyncratic approach obviously didn't bother many players (old and new), since the *Dungeons & Dragons* line has always been a top seller. However, in the third edition *Player's Handbook* Jonathan Tweet and his design team wisely address the game engine's inconsistency by instituting a system of regular attribute bonuses that affect just about every action a player might want to take in precisely the same way.

Want to tag a gnoll with a crossbow bolt? Resist damage from a poisoned dagger? Charm an innkeeper with a song? You make exactly the same sort of roll for each action, applying bonuses identically in each case. Most impressively, the new *D&D* designers managed to achieve this streamlining without jettisoning the most solid and familiar aspects of the game: its six attributes, its spell mechanics, its roster of archetypal classes and races, and its emphasis on exploration, planning, and combat.

A full-blown new skill system is probably the most dramatic alteration of the old *D&D* ruleset, but it dovetails nicely with the familiar mechanics and doesn't feel too tacked-on. The skill rules are, in fact, a sterling example of how seamlessly the *Player's Handbook* weaves new rules and approaches into the matrix of older ones.

Visually as well, the new *Player's Handbook* is a treat. The bargain-hunter in me enjoys knowing each time I crack it open that Wizards must be losing money bigtime: after all, twenty dollars for three hundred high-gloss, full-color, hard-bound pages? The art is fetching, the layout of text on each page lucid, and the organization of the whole pleasingly sensible. Unlike some of the older *AD&D* books, the new *Player's Handbook* can be read from start to finish with minimal headaches and genuine pleasure in the quality of the prose and the illustration.

Now *Dungeons & Dragons* is even more accessible, both to the curious novice and the weathered grognard who has moved on to other worlds but thinks he might want to return to the game of his youth. The *Pyramid* review seems to suggest, though, that the new *D&D* didn't go far enough, didn't junk the minis-and-hex-maps approach altogether and join newer, more sophisticated products in their emphasis on character development and narrative structure over +3 longswords, Otto's Irresistible Dance, and the ubiquitous 50' length of rope. The changes are nice, the review implies, but not enough to compete in a more urbane, enlightened RPG market that wants character and themes, not rules and tables. And certainly not radical enough to create a game that is truly approachable for new players.

I'm an old-timer now, so it's hard for me to recollect without the taint of nostalgia. But in order to imagine what the new Player's Handbook must be like for brand-new converts to the hobby, all I have to do is a little time-traveling of my own, all the way back to 1980, when the AD&D handbooks seemed more arcane than any wizard's tomes. They were packed with dense, crabbed text, suffered from horrible organization, and were written in a style I can only refer to as Gygaxian -- lots of arch syntax and fancy vocabulary. And they were expensive, much more so relative to their

time than the new books.

I didn't care; I loved 'em. Loved 'em, read 'em, and learned 'em backwards and forwards. And I wasn't alone. Even after scads of new product, much of it hipper, poured into the hobby gaming marketplace, thousands of kids like me still chose to cut their teeth on *Dungeons & Dragons*.

In retrospect, I'm convinced that I loved the old books precisely because they were complex and meaty, because they were packed with character classes -- one of the initial review's more inscrutable criticisms of the new *Player's Handbook* is that it devotes a hundred-odd pages to character creation -- along with endless lists of spells and magical artifacts. I loved the books because they were grown-up. Because they were mysterious. Because some of them had pictures of scarcely-clad women in them (or scarcely-clad men, if your taste ran in that direction). And because they didn't talk down.

If I were an adult who'd never roleplayed, I'd feel even more patronized by a game that sought to oversimplify everything. *Dungeons & Dragons* may overstructure certain parts of the roleplaying experience, such as character creation and magic use, but at least it does so in a way that allows a rich feast of options within that framework: lots of races, lots of classes, lots of spells.

As I've said, I'm all for streamlining, simplifying, and clarifying when needed, and one of the best things about Messrs. Tweet et alles' rehaul of the old game engine is its clear, logical presentation. But one can go too far: Anyone remember *DragonStrike*!? It was one of TSR's many watered-down entry-level *D&D* products, and it tanked. Fast. I think it failed precisely because the people who wanted to roleplay, who tend to be a bit more intelligent and imaginative than the norm anyway, cut to the chase and went straight to *AD&D*. (By the way, if you ever get a chance to pick up a copy of *DragonStrike!* for cheap, as my wife and I did, by all means do. The hilarious "how to roleplay" videotape alone is worth the price of admission, and has inspired some memorable drinking games among our circle of friends.)

I suspect that if I were a creative, bookish eight-year-old today, I'd crave the new *Player's Handbook* just as much as I lusted after the first edition twenty years ago. In fact, I think I'd want it more, because Wizards of the Coast has done a bang-up job of ramping up the kewlness quotient of the new game: "You mean my druid starts out with a pet wolf? Kewl!"; "You mean my barbarian can go into a berserker rage like Wolverine from *X-Men*? Kewl!" The art, as *Pyramid*'s reviewer observes, supports the wow factor as well. All these bells and whistles, wedded to a cleaner, faster system, are what will make new players want to roll up alter-egos and start smacking orcs. New players, particularly kids, don't want pabulum. They want a wide assortment of fruit flavors, with mouth-fizzing action thrown in for good measure.

Clarifying and streamlining are worthy goals for the *Dungeons & Dragons* property. Throwing away the gloriously straightforward approach to roleplaying that characterizes the game, or vetting it of the capacious tactical options it offers players, as some seem to wish the new edition had done, are not. I'm reminded of a certain proverb about babies and bathwater -- *D&D* is what it is, and while it can certainly be a better *D&D*, expecting the third edition of the game to suddenly resemble a narratively sophisticated, rules-light game like *Castle Falkenstein* or *Vampire* is fatuous.

In fact, I would argue that the more conceptually (as opposed to statistically) sophisticated a game is, the harder it is for most newbies. High-concept hooks like *D&D* (it's just like *Lord of the Rings*! Or *Warhammer*! Or *Magic*!) and *Deadlands* (zombie Cowboys and Indians!) almost always provide a better point of entry than low-concept, narratively intricate properties like, say, *Fading Suns* (um, it's a sort of allegory for the Dark Ages, only set far in the future, with the gradual dimming of the stars as a metaphor for the dangers of mankind's hubris and ignorance, and there are demons and psi powers and weird horselike aliens that have sex with decadent nobles and. . .).

Storytelling and characterization are in some ways much harder aspects of the roleplaying hobby for many new players; lots of novice GM's would go mad trying to run an Everway campaign simply because the rules are too simple -- simple to the point of maddening abstraction for anyone new to RPG's. Newcomers can roleplay, but they often do so most comfortably in the context of the sort of precise rules and stats that the Player's Handbook supplies; I may not know my character's relationship history from adolescence up, but I know he's a fighter, so he must be brave. I know

he's a half-orc, so he must be crude. I know he's got a low Intelligence, so he must speak like a caveman. And bang! I'm off and running. Depth comes later, once I've got my legs under me.

I should add at this point that there is nothing in the new Player's Handbook actively preventing character development or multilayered storytelling. I agree with Pyramid's reviewer that the new game doesn't seem to emphasize these facets of the RPG experience, but am not sure that this omission isn't a canny one. New players can concentrate first on the logical presentation of the game mechanics (which are familiar from other types of hobby game, and which make for an entertaining game of exploration and melee as is), while experienced vets know how to add such narrative elements to their campaigns from the start if they see fit.

I think that the vast majority of new players will be well served by the new *Dungeons & Dragons*, especially the younger set. Kids and adults alike can handle the complexity of the rules, the one aspect of D&D that most resembles more "conventional" games. And they can get a handle on the accessible power-fantasy: wizards and warriors exploring perilous dungeons and battling evil monsters to gain fabulous treasures. They'll like the art. They'll like the cool character hooks. They'll like the scope of the game world. They'll like it, they'll buy it, and they'll play it. With all due respect to the *Dungeons & Dragons* brand name and to Hasbro's marketing clout (which are the only two selling points of the game for new players that Pyramid's review concedes), it's the classic magic of the setting and the intriguing complexity of the statistics-based play that will pull new players in.

As for the rest of us, for whom stalking the mean streets of the Gothic-Punk world has begun to, ahem, pale, *Dungeons & Dragons Third Edition* promises a return to a younger, more wondrous time: kewl is still kewl, at eight or at twenty-nine. We can bring everything we've learned about character development and storytelling with us, of course. But we can also rediscover the simple joys of natural 20's, magic missiles that always hit, and that yawning cave mouth leading down into the unknown. The new *Player's Handbook* is a far better passport to that wondrous land than the old *D&D* books were, and a far better introduction to roleplaying than any other title out there. Who needs a time machine after all?

-- John Deal

Pyramid Review, Take 3

Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition

Published by Wizards of the Coast

Written by Jonathan Tweet, Monte Cook, and Skip Williams

300 pages and Demo CD-Rom; $19.95

I managed to get my hands on a copy of *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition Player's Handbook* about a week ago, and a day hasn't passed since then that I haven't read or re-read parts of the book, fooled around with the CD-ROM or played the game with some friends. The design team smoothed out the rough edges from *Advanced Dungeons & Dragon 2nd Edition* and added tons of new goodies to make *D&D 3rd Edition* the best combat-oriented RPG you can buy. Most of the rules have changed but the spirit of the game remains the same: it's all about slaughtering nasty creatures and creating a legendary hero in the process. If you strongly prefer games where combat rarely occurs you probably won't enjoy *D&D 3rd Edition* any more than you would have enjoyed *AD&D*. On the other hand, if chopping an Ogre in half with a huge sword, frying a dozen Goblins with a fireball or destroying legions of the undead with divine grace sounds like fun you will love this game.

Neither rules nor dice restrict the character you can create. In older editions, powerful classes such as the Paladin had stringent ability requirements and high experience costs to advance in level. *D&D 3rd* allows any race to be a member of any class and eliminates ability score requirements. Furthermore, every class uses the same experience chart to advance in levels. Powerful classes like the Paladin remain largely unchanged while weaker classes like the Fighter have been given new benefits that put them in the same weight class as Paladins and preserve the class' flavor. These changes let players create whatever type of character they want and ensure each character will be on equal footing.

Players can also customize their characters using new abilities called feats. Every character gets one feat at first level and a new one every third level after that. Bonus feats are awarded to humans and some other classes. Feats generally give you a bonus to certain rolls or let the character pull off a cool new stunt. For example, Improved Initiative gives you a +4 bonus to your initiative roll, and Weapon Focus gives you a +1 bonus with a specific weapon. My favorite combat feat is Cleave, a feat that lets you carry through with your attack to chop through two foes with a single swing. Spellcasters can take metamagic feats that enhance the spells they cast if they're willing to prepare them in a higher-level slot. If you want to make sure you can still cast Magic Missile when you're gagged, you could use the Silent Spell feat to memorize Magic Missile as one of your second level spells for the day (instead of as a first-level spell.)

Feats also make magical items creation rules playable, balanced, and thematically appropriate. A spellcaster must take a feat for each type of magical item they wish to create (scrolls, potions, wands etc.) . The caster gathers the necessary materials (often an adventure by itself), works on the magical item for the appropriate amount of time and spends 1/25 the value of the item in experience points to produce the desired item. This system prevents spellcasters from mass-producing powerful items and the experience point expenditure can be described in game as putting some of yourself into your work. Best of all, there's no rolling involved so you can be sure your hard work and sacrifice will pay off.

Other aspects of the magic system have also been reworked to make the rules more logical and easier to use. Players make saving throws to overcome magical effects with a difficulty based on the spell's level and the spellcaster's skill.

You get a Reflex save to dodge fireballs, a Will save to avoid being charmed and a Fortitude save to resist being turned to stone. Magic Resistance has been replaced with Spell Resistance, an ability that allows some creatures to completely negate the effects of your spells without making a saving throw. Spellcaster's get a bonus on their roll to overcome Spell Resistance based on their level so you can take solace in the fact that with each level you gain you'll have a better chance to affect powerful creatures with your spells. Finally, you can now counterspell hostile spells as they're being cast by casting Dispel Magic, the same spell your opponent just cast or one that has an opposite effect. To avoid confusion, spellcasters are now described as preparing spells rather than memorizing them. It seems pretty clear to me that wizards and clerics can only use a spell slot once per day. It is however, perfectly valid to criticize WotC for not giving a good in-game explanation for how spellcasting works.

At the beginning to the chapter on spells, the spells each class can cast are listed by level along with a one-sentence description of the spell's effect. There is a separate list for Bards, Clerics, Druids, Paladins and Rangers. Sorcerers and Wizards share the same list except for a few spells that are useless for Sorcerers. After the class lists every spell is listed alphabetically. This format is an excellent way of organizing the spells since it allows players to select spells from their class list quickly or look up the spell's full description during play with equal ease.

The biggest change to the spell list is the addition of zero level spells and expanding the range of clerical or divine spells to ninth level. Zero level spells such as detect magic produce minor but useful effects. Most of the new high-level divine spells are good but some seem unimaginative. For instance, Holy Aura, Unholy Aura, Shield of Law and Cloak of Chaos all have a nearly identical effect except for the alignment they protect against. As for the rest of the list, most of your favorite spells are unchanged and there are a fair number of cool new spells to try out. One of my favorites is the first level Wizard spell Expeditious Retreat; it doubles your speed for one minute per level -- great when combined a ranged weapon or long range spells.

I can't heap enough praise on the design team for all the other neat little tidbits throughout the book. The combat chapter brings new strategies to your battles by adding lots of new tricks you can try to pull off in combat. It also gives rules for performing the "coup de grace" against a helpless foe to finish them off with style. The equipment chapter has a diverse selection of weapons that give you new and exciting was to kill your enemies. Exotic weapons such as the Two-Bladed Sword and the Orc Double Axe seemed original to me and even though some of the weapons certainly are impractical, the stated goal of the design team was to create cool weapons rather than realistic ones.

Although the game revolves around combat, players will have opportunities to surmount other challenges. A good example of this can be found in the introductory adventure provided on the CD-ROM. (Finding the adventure on the CD-ROM is a small challenge by itself, since I only found it by searching my CD drive with the "Find Files or Folders" tool from the Start menu.) The PCs need to rescue Lord Khulvan's kidnapped nephew Allayn from the clutches of the devious merchant Cordwellyn; clever players may be able to discover his guilt before he dispatches assassins to eliminate them. Later on in the adventure, the PCs will need to negotiate with an Orcish tribe and solve several puzzles in the tribe's burial caves to discover Allayn's location. The new skill system handles nonviolent scenes wonderfully although the last challenge in most adventures will probably still be an epic battle against a fearsome foe.

Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition offers more reasons for new gamers to buy it than just "the name and Hasbro's advertising money." The biggest advantage is the *D&D* genre has become pervasive enough to spread into popular culture. Do you think someone who's never seen any Hong Kong style action movies could understand or enjoy *Feng Shui*? Non-gamers have a good idea what most races and classes are like without having to read a detailed description. *Dungeons & Dragons* also has the advantages of being the biggest game system on the market: it's easy to find people to play with and there are terabytes of free *D&D* stuff online created by fans.

The *Dungeons & Dragons* class and level system also caters to beginning players. The class system gives players a package of abilities so the can start playing quickly. At the end of each class description in *D&D 3rd Edition* there's a starting package for the class that gives the players a short list of maxed-out skills to choose from and preselected weapons and feats. The fact that combat advancement is set in stone helps beginners by automatically giving them abilities that will make them a valuable member of the party. In other systems where players can buy any ability they want with experience points beginners can become outclassed by veteran players who know the best abilities to buy. In *D&D* an inexperienced 11 year old can do just as well as a parent playing with them.

Dungeons & Dragons also goes farther in terms of a character's advancement in power than any other game I've seen. All you need to do is survive each adventure to accumulate power -- and even death just slows you down. You can begin as a rookie Wizard who has trouble dealing with half a dozen goblins and work you way up to an 20th level powerhouse who's ready to give the gods a run for their money. This sort of advancement would be impractical outside of a level system -- new players would be bewildered by all of the options available to them and veterans would advance too quickly by choosing the best abilities to buy. Yes, this is power gaming, but within a level system there isn't much a competitive player can do to rise above the rest of the group. Power gaming may be juvenile, but if everyone in your group enjoys it there's no shame in turning your characters into god slayers.

Lastly, most roleplayers will agree that creating a living breathing character is the hardest part of any game. ***Dungeons and Dragons*** lets beginners start having fun right away and slowly work on their character's personality as they progress. Depicting a character that acts differently than you do is a great deal easier than portraying a character that thinks differently than you do. Since the ***D&D*** alignment system gives you suggestions how your character should act in certain situations, it serves as useful tool to guide beginning players. Beginners also do well in **D&D** since nearly all of their experience points come from killing monsters. In some roleplaying games, such as White Wolf's ***Mind's Eye Theatre***, as much as half your experience comes from roleplaying awards. Skilled players can potentially leave beginners in the dust in these systems.

Dungeons & Dragons has enjoyed widespread popularity for the past 25 years. During those years, roleplaying games have become too diverse for there to be any single RPG worthy of being called the best. ***D&D 3rd Edition*** offers you the chance to slay monsters, right wrongs and save the kingdom from the foul machinations of various villains. If that sort of game sounds appealing you owe it to yourself to give ***Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition*** a look. If you're already a fan of ***D&D*** or similar games you've probably got this book already. I've got to get going now, Cordwellyn may be dead but his foul patron, Lord Beoric, is plotting revenge…

-- Adam Kalafarski

Wedding Bells

On August 26th, the day after this column runs, I'll be ending thirteen straight months of pain, agony, and torture. The horrors will come to a very sudden and abrupt end.

I'll be getting married.

There's a long sordid story about meeting a wonderful man during a roleplaying game -- Fiat Justitia, an In Nomine game, to be precise -- falling in love, and deciding to get hitched. It's long, it's boring, and I'll spare the reader. Post-proposal, planning the wedding began in earnest. "It couldn't be that bad, could it?" I said. "How hard is it to put on a wedding? How bad could it be?"

It's that bad. Actually, it's worse. It's enough to make a hardened **Call of Cthulhu** investigator go stark, raving buggo. Each part of the wedding process should be clearly labeled with a Sanity check. Sure, an investigator may be faced with the Goat of a Thousand Young, but staring down that horror is far preferable to six straight hours looking through invitation books in the back of a small, stuffy, uncomfortable stationary shop.

When it comes to adventures, madness and mayhem, roleplaying has nothing on real life. Real life can cough up some amazing things when it wants. Luckily, this was a learning experience. Like all good lessons, a savvy GM can immediately steal and leech from reality and turn real life paranoia into game terms and be used to torture players until they scream for mercy. Weddings happen, even to the best of us -- why not use them in a game?

Wedding: The Suffering

Weddings generate more pain than a pack of werewolves on the hunt, more agony than a trapped wraith denied the afterlife, and more angst than a vampire who chipped a tooth and tore a little lace. They send people into an absolute tizzy of activity. With so many interchangeable parts, something is bound to go wrong -- and something always does, without fail. As a plot hook, it's a chance for a little mayhem, especially when it lands in the laps of player characters.

Weddings are a staple of comedy movies, and have been used effectively in horror media for generations. From *Father of the Bride* to *the Bride of Frankenstein* to *Four Weddings and a Funeral*, weddings have been the inspiration for many great storylines. They can be a conclusion to a great plot arc, or just the thing to kick off a campaign. They're wonderful if the party includes a balanced number of female and male players, if the party is female-inclined, or if the party tends toward the romantic and dramatic.

How do characters get themselves into the position of facing impeding nuptials? Usually, it's a part of the GM's plot. A damsel in distress might have been rescued from a far off tower, and the reward for her return was her hand given in marriage. The game is set in the Orient, and the player or players have found themselves involved in *omiai kekkon*, the Japanese art of arranged marriages, at the behest of a lord, patron, or parents. Characters may find themselves forced to marry for dark, evil ends. The player may be playing high stakes political games, and find that a marriage will get him or her an edge to the wheeling and dealing of renaissance Europe. Two characters may simply fall in love and decide they want to tie the knot.

Weddings can also be used as a setting, especially for conspiracy games, one shot LARPs, or games with an element of political intrigue. Any genre, from high fantasy to science fiction, will do. Scheming plans can be concocted and can culminate in a murder at the reception party. A jilted lover, in a moment of high tension during the ceremony, can decry the groom as a false paramour. The bride can be kidnapped minutes before the nuptials, carried off to some unknown destination by a baddy with a waxed mustache and an evil laugh. The king of the land may pass out face first into the punch bowl. Both men and women can get in on the act at the reception party, giving each other looks of longing and cunning over the fruit bowl.

Think that just because the character is male, the character is going to escape the pain? Think again -- there's a GM on

the other end of those dice, and grinning. And a female character? Hah! The marriage proposal is only the *beginning*. Fun? Happy? Wonderful? Weddings are nothing if they are not a test of character for both sides, the bride and the groom.

What Can Go Wrong, Does

Either through plot or setting, the player finds himself faced with a wedding -- typically his or her own. The first instinct may be to run. It's a good instinct. Act on it. But if running for the hills is not possible -- perhaps because the soon-to-be-bethrothed's neckless brothers have large crossbows aimed at the character's head -- the player needs to embrace the inevitable, and the show must go on.

With a shindig of this size and importance, something is bound to go horribly wrong. In a roleplaying world, almost anything can happen during the magic moment at the altar when the two characters become man and wife, and usually, it does. The GM can make it an event pregnant with purpose, dropping the hammer at just the right moment, or she can make it the focal point of her plot. The following sections outline possible game seeds of things that could go wrong -- or right -- during the course of a wedding in a myriad of different genres.

Fantasy

A fantasy setting is easy, and popular, to bend into any mold. Plot seeds for marriage, from rescuing the fair damsel to spending just one too many nights with that barmaid abound. Since magic, magical creatures, and fantasy abound with the possibility of sudden wackiness at any moment, the GM can toss in some real gems during the gaming sessions. These include:

- The cake has been replaced with the Head of Vecna. The reception guests fight over who gets to have their head removed for ultimate power.
- A mischievous elf replaced the wedding bands with cursed bands of gaseous form. The bride and groom can't touch after their vows until the curse is removed.
- Last-minute revelation indicates that bride and groom are of incompatible alignments. The wedding is called off.
- Raiding party from neighboring Dukedom raids the reception seeking booty. They carry off the bride and her attendants to hold them for ransom.
- Magic luggage eats the wedding cake and several guests.

Horror

Dark things can occur during weddings, especially the ceremony. Two dark forces can be melded into one. Black rituals can be embedded into the vows. The ceremony can be performed as a black mass. The church can be built on unhallowed ground. Horror GMs, well known for their relentless natures and their dark visions for games and gaming in general (oh, how I love them), should not allow their weddings to become too happy!

- The bridesmaids include succubi, licking their lips and sizing up the all too human groomsmen and guests -- and their souls.
- Antique wedding vows are really an incantation to summon Nyarlathotep. The incantation must be stopped before he appears and takes the souls of everyone in the bridal party.
- Zombies, sent by a political enemy, storm and ravage the reception. Guests are forced to fight for their lives or be turned into zombies themselves.
- Black curses, placed upon the bride and groom by a spurned lover well versed in the arts of Voodoo, is cast during the ceremony.
- The wedding mass is really a black mass, and at the end of the ceremony the NPC groomsman means to take the PC bride as a sacrifice to his dark lord.

Western

The love between and of lone gunmen, running from the law, is the source of stories from *Bonnie and Clyde* to *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. When hounded by the Marshal's men, with death on every side, there's a chance to take a piece of real love -- and spin it into an effective game campaign.

- Spurned lover decides he will be the one who objects to the ceremony, breaks into the church and holds up the wedding party at gunpoint.
- The wife or groom is on the run from the law. They get married in a secluded Spanish church while the Marshal's men are slowly surrounding them.
- The wife and groom get married against the backdrop of the Civil War, and the groom must return as soon as the ceremony concludes to the War Between the States. . . and certain death.
- The groom became an outlaw, but now he's bent on rebuilding a life with wife, family, home and farm. But the past -- and the law -- has a way of catching up with him.

Science Fiction

Science fiction is a fast and varied genre. Two people can find love in a war between races, across Cyberspace, or even on a ship traveling between galaxies. The bond between two beings, as shown in marriages on *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* can be just as strong as those of the same race. But just like those shows, there cannot be weddings without a few catches in the works. Nothing is simple, not even in the year 3000.

- The bride and the groom belong to two vaguely humanoid races that are compatible. War between their races breaks out during the reception, and they're torn apart by the fighting.
- One of the bridesmaids is infected with a parasite, which bursts out of her midsection to infect and eat the guests during the reception party.
- The marriage isn't between two humans, but two humans transmuted to artificial intelligences trapped within a virtual world, trying to fuse into one before their mainframe is shut down and they are both destroyed.
- The bride turns out to be a clone of a different, real woman and hasn't told the groom -- or anyone else. The real woman discovers the wedding and breaks into it to stop the ceremony before it can complete.

The GM is, of course, welcome to expand on these ideas, change parts of them, add in his or her own experiences from his or her wedding, or completely ignore the suggestions completely. There's a wealth of information out there to pull wedding details from: movies, television shows, books, and friends who have survived the ordeal and lived to tell about it. A good GM will tap her resources and use it to her advantage. Combined with a few plot ideas, she can turn a wedding into a major part of her campaign.

Remember: if something can go wrong, or will go wrong, it should go wrong!

A Quick Conclusion

All I can *(wedding)* think about *(wedding)* right now *(wedding)* is the wedding. *(wedding)* I don't know why, though. It boggles the mind. *(wedding)*

Take it from me: this wedding thing is hard. Oh, sure, it includes marrying a gamer and a living room cabinet filled with cheery games, Legos, Nerf, and electronic toys. But after a few months of planning, it makes driving out to Vegas and getting married by an Elvis Impersonator at a drive-through look good. It would make even the most battle hardened Paladin start to consider a different line of work.

After thirteen months of preparation, upon return from the honeymoon I'm going to be checking myself into the nearest madhouse for a little rest. But like all major events in one's life, one can walk away from it with a sense of accomplishment, of surviving a disaster so horrible that it must leave scars, and the knowledge that anything, anything at all, can be used to liven up a roleplaying game featuring the battle of the sexes.

I'm off to Italy!

Can You Dig It? The Oak Island Money Pit

"And there will be things down there that you cannot imagine."
-- psychic Ray Nutt, on the Oak Island Money Pit (1976)

That seems unlikely, given what I (and several people rather more Nutt-like than I) have already imagined is down there. "Down there," of course, being at the bottom of the mysterious shaft on Oak Island, off Nova Scotia, known as the Money Pit. Not, necessarily, because there's money down there (although it's not impossible), but because millions of dollars (and six lives) have been spent trying to get down there where we can't imagine. There may not even be any "down there" down there, in fact, which means I, and the psychic Nutts, are free to dig deep and imagine whatever we like.

"I wish much I could have gone up the coast this summer and visited Oak Island and seen the work you are doing -- for I shall always be interested in that romantic spot. I hope that you will let me know how you have been getting on with modern methods . . ."
-- President Franklin D. Roosevelt, letter to Erwin H. Hamilton, August 31, 1938

The first person to imagine things about Oak Island was one Daniel McInnis (or McGuinness, or some variant). In 1795, he and two friends attempted to excavate a shallow depression where he said he'd seen a block and tackle hanging from a "burnt branch" on one of the oak trees that got the island's name changed from Gloucester Island 150 years ago. By 1805, although McInnis' group had discovered oak platforms and a flat inscribed stone (its code eventually translated as "Forty Feet Below Two Million Pounds Are Buried," the cipher stone itself conveniently disappeared), and dug 90 feet down, they had also somehow filled their shaft with seawater. Later attempts in 1849-1850, 1858, 1861-1862 (which succeeded in collapsing the original Money Pit, if such there was, into its own tunnel and caving everything in), 1866, 1891, 1897-1900 (this one including a young Franklin D. Roosevelt), 1922, 1934-1938, 1955, 1959-1960, 1965-1966, and 1970-1987 have yielded enigmatic artifacts such as watch-chain links and scraps of parchment, flooded and caved in the site beyond all recognition (one source puts the number of excavation shafts through the area at 37), and killed six people. For the thrilling details, see D'Arcy O'Connor's *The Big Dig*.

The most reasonable explanation (which, don't worry, we're going to abandon before we even get to the end of this paragraph, much less this column) is that the Money Pit is a natural sinkhole that youthful McInnis' imagination combined with legends of pirate treasure -- the "artifacts" can be easily explained as forgeries, as shipwreck fragments sucked into the sinkhole by tides, or (by now) as relics of previous excavations. The geology and stratigraphy of that part of Nova Scotia contains plenty of other examples of shafts, wells, and caves all of which regularly flood with seawater with the tides and shifts in the water table. It's even barely possible that there was an actual cache there (buried, perhaps, 20 feet down where the boys dug through the first oak platform) at one time, and that the block and tackle showed that it had been removed. It's not even impossible that the British Navy dug a more elaborate shaft there, either as an ammunition dump or even as a holding station for the treasures of Havana, which Lord Albermarle captured for King George III in 1762 (and maybe kept a little extra out as a retirement fund).

It's highly unlikely that the various pirates associated with Oak Island in the mythology had the patience to dig all the elaborate traps and intersecting tunnels that later diggers have theorized, but if it makes you happy, there's no reason to insist that Captain Kidd didn't leave something there, once upon a time. After all, occult author Harold Wilkins produced a copy of "Captain Kidd's treasure map" which was an exact map of Oak Island, and contained cryptic instructions which actually described a series of stones in a triangle pointing to the treasure! Of course, when the excited excavator Gilbert Hedden finally confronted Wilkins, the author admitted that he'd made up the map, and its instructions, out of whole cloth after seeing an entirely different map somewhere else. Wilkins decided that he must be the reincarnation of Captain Kidd; Hedden decided Wilkins was crazy and went back to digging.

"We have large and deepe Caves of severall Depths: The deepest are sunke 600. Fathome . . . These Caves we call the Lower Region; and wee vse them for all . . . Conservations of Bodies."
-- Sir Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis*

Of course Wilkins was crazy. Why be the reincarnation of Captain Kidd when you can be the reincarnation of [Sir Francis Bacon](#)? As part of Dee's occult imperialist circle, Bacon would have had access to the secret maps of Nova Scotia that circulated through Britain ahead of its "official" exploration by Samuel de Champlain from 1604 to 1607 -- possibly compiled by Sir Humphrey Gilbert (who "mysteriously disappeared" in the North Atlantic in 1582) or John Cabot (who "mysteriously disappeared" in the North Atlantic in 1498). Bacon could not only draw on the mining knowledge of figures like [Hariot and Raleigh](#) (who, as Warden of the Stannaries, commanded the most experienced miners in Cornwall) but his own not inconsiderable scientific genius. In both *The New Atlantis* and *Sylva Sylvarum* he describes means of digging chambers and tunnels, and then safeguarding them with floodshafts and concealing them beneath seemingly natural features. He also discusses preserving treasures (such as parchments) in mercury; mercury is one of the anomalous materials discovered in the Money Pit. (An ivory boatswain's whistle of Elizabethan manufacture has also turned up on the island.) In 1610, a royal charter granted Bacon "all the islands" from Oak Island to Newfoundland. "Kidd's Triangle" points to a compass deviation from north of 14 degrees -- which occurred in 1611, the year after Bacon's grant, and the year that Shakespeare (ha-ha!) wrote *The Tempest*, about a magical island and a "drowned book." In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, in fact, Bacon explicitly puts "the new Atlantis" at 45 degrees of latitude, the same latitude as Oak Island. What did Bacon so desperately need to hide there? Well, his Rosicrucian treasures (which, according to Rosicrucian legend, are hidden in a buried tomb) of course, and his original first drafts of Shakespeare's plays. And, maybe, the Holy Grail.

"In one of these harbors, three to four leagues north of Poutrincourt Cape, we found a very old cross, all covered with moss, an unmistakable sign that formerly Christians had been there."
-- Samuel de Champlain, on Nova Scotia (1607)

Assuming, of course, that the Templars didn't bury it there first. That, at least, is the argument (also buttressed by psychic dowsing, should you doubt its bona fides) in Michael Bradley's *Holy Grail Across the Atlantic*, presented more clearly, though with far less entertaining divagation and detail, in Steven Sora's *The Lost Treasure of the Knights Templar*. Both books make much of the secret maps, especially the 1545 Caspar Vopell illustration of Nova Scotia with a Templar knight, and the various 16th century maps placing a "Port of Refuge" roughly where Oak Island is today, and various stone crosses have emerged from the island, many with unmistakeably Masonic inscriptions. (Another explanation for the mysterious tale of Lost Treasure may lie in the fact that virtually all the excavators of the Money Pit have been Freemasons and the tale may be a colorful pageant Making Manifest That Which Is Hidden.) Bottom line, however, the solid physical evidence for Templar visitation returns to these three facts: Oak Island had oaks older than 300 years on it in 1800, oaks are not native to North America, and acorns don't float across the Atlantic. (For those playing at home, the real answer is "Basque fishermen.") The rest all descends into those "Templars went to Scotland, Scots went to Nova Scotia and pestered the Micmac Indians, and they were all Masonic *Prieuré de Sion* pawns" theories I've covered in a [previous column](#).

"They may have been built by Vikings visiting the New World, or by the native Micmac people who lived in the region before the Europeans appeared. Perhaps they were built by an advanced civilization that we know nothing about. Indeed the flood tunnel trap built into the pit in some ways reminds one of the false doors and granite plugs found in Egyptian tombs to prevent grave robbing."
-- Lee Krystek, "The Mystery Pit of Oak Island"

Which leads us to the Micmac people of Nova Scotia who, as it turns out, had a hieroglyphic alphabet that, at least according to some Canadian scholars, predated French exploration. Better still, according to excitable pseudepigrapher Barry Fell in *America B.C.*, Micmac hieroglyphs are very closely cognate with ancient Egyptian hieratic script! (They do, in fact, predate Champollion's deciphering of hieroglyphs.) Now, we're getting somewhere. The script roughly indicates a date between 1400 and 800 B.C. To add to this exciting scenario, one Charles B. Thomas of Great Falls, Montana, managed to decipher the Great Pyramid of Cheops and discover that its exact duplicate is buried, upside down, beneath Oak Island, full of the [treasures of Jerusalem](#)! Which would, of course, include the Ark of the Covenant.

"Q: What is buried on Oak Island?
A: Regenerator.
Q: What is a regenerator?

A: Remolecularizer.
Q: Who put it there?
A: Lizard beings.
Q: When did they put it there?
A: 10,000 years ago, approximately."
-- channelled exchange (12/10/94) between Laura Knight-Jadczyk and the Cassiopaeans, *The Orion Archetype and the Destiny of Man*

Between the Ark and the Grail, the Money Pit is getting pretty full. Good thing it uses Reptoid-Atlantean remolecularizer technology. One Alexander Stang Fraser theorizes that the Money Pit is a sacred tomb of the last Sage-King of [Atlantis](#), which was (apparently) the Grand Banks before they sank; the vast organic deposits of a dead city are what attract all those fish (and Basque fishermen). In that context, it's interesting to note that the current excavation company which owns the island is Triton Alliance, Ltd., the Tritons, of course, being the fish-men who served Poseidon -- lord of Atlantis. Could that be another Making Manifest of That Which is Hidden, putting the amphibian Nommo involvement (from whence we can go back down the Bloodline to the Templars and Bacon again) hidden, as it were, in plain sight? Does this somehow tie in with the fact that the "Kidd Triangle" has a rounded "crescent" below it, which together make not only the Masonic arc-and-compass rune, but the ancient symbol for the far North -- Thule? Could the Port of Refuge be the [Space-Nazi](#) Time-Refuge, a hidden gate to [Antarctica](#) built around a gravitic anomaly that causes all those sinkings and ghost-sightings and mysterious vanishings of British explorers? Is that the secret meaning of "Norumbega," the "Norman (Aryan) Fortress" mentioned by the crypto-Templar Verrazano before he, too, vanished? (Well, he died in the West Indies two years later. It's like vanishing.) Could this be why suspected Nazi agent Errol Flynn attempted to take control of Oak Island in 1940? Could it explain the UFO crash into nearby Shag Harbor on October 8, 1967? Could it, at the very least, be a heck of a thing to slap into your *GURPS Illuminati-Places of Mystery* game? The answers to all these questions [lie beneath](#) 200 years of sinkholes, traps, explosions, forgeries, and Masonic ritual just off the coast of Nova Scotia. Dig in.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

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by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

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Murphy's Rules

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Part Story, Part Game, Part Nostalgia

Over in the [newsgroups](#), there have been various discussions lately about introductions to gaming. Now, I'm not going to share my first introduction to gaming yet (you'll need to ply me with more Harvey Wallbangers for those embarrassments . . . besides, I already shared my [Torg story](#); what more do you want?). But I *will* talk about what I consider to be one of the more formative elements to my own roleplaying.

Back in the early 80's, when I was a wee lad, there were a series of books called . . . well, it's difficult to say what they were called. I guess the generic term nowadays would be "paragraph book." Basically a paragraph book is a story with multiple paths; at its simplest level, this can simply mean a branching story with one beginning and multiple endings.

> "'No! Don't open that door!' shouts your friend. 'You don't know what's in there!'
>
> *If you open the door, turn to page 17.*
> *If you decide against opening the door, turn to page 8.*"

The first books I remember reading like this were part of the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series. It spawned a number of imitators, and were wildly popular with young folks. These books, while fun, were fairly limited. Since most were about 120 pages or so, with at most one choice per page, the amount of interactivity was somewhat restrictive. On the other hand, there were multiple "correct" paths to good outcomes, and the stories could take wild turns early on ('If you want to get in the spaceship, turn to page 4. If you want to explore the haunted house, turn to page 19.'), which seemed to suit the wild creativity of an elementary schooler.

Shortly thereafter I encountered the *Fighting Fantasy* series. Started in 1982 with *The Warlock on Firetop Mountain* by Steve Jackson (the one from the UK) and Ian Livingstone, the *Fighting Fantasy* series were more interactive because they crammed multiple entries onto a page; most books in the series had 400 paragraphs. This allowed for more complex stories.

In addition, a simple roleplaying combat system existed within the *FF* series. You had attributes (Skill, Stamina, and Luck), a die mechanic (2d6), inventory (weapons, healing potions, loot), and so forth. These were, in my opinion, my first introduction to many of my favorite aspects of RPGs.

They were often interestingly plotted, with interesting premises, conundrums, and plot twists.

- You are given the Talisman of Death, and must escape to another world with it to keep it out of the clutches of evil. (*Talisman of Death*)
- You and your starship are stranded halfway across the galaxy. Can you amass the clues to help you and your crew escape? (*Starship Traveller*)
- You are charged with killing a deadly Yeti. You do this in about five passages . . . and then the real adventure begins. (*Caverns of the Snow Witch*)
- You are part of a dungeon contest to see who can escape. The odds of escape are slim, and there can be only one victor. Within the catacombs you encounter another adventurer; do you befriend him and try to escape together? (*Deathtrap Dungeon*)

They were steeped in atmosphere. Since they were written in the second person, they served as mind-food for my proto-GM mind. And, for the most part, they were excellent at crafting a scene. "The Spit Toad leaps at you at the same instant that you thrust your sword out at you. The weight of the Spit Toad knocks you to the ground but your sword has found its mark; the blade is lodged up to the hilt in the Spit Toad's throat. It shudders in its death throes, while you crawl out from under its massive belly." (*Island of the Lizard King*, 339) (Dang, I need to get a Spit Toad into one of my games . . . hmm . . . ***Aberrant*** or ***In Nomine***?)

They were filled with genre possibilities. From fantasy, to horror (*House of Hades* [or *Hell*, if you weren't in the US]), to space, to superheroes (*Appointment with F.E.A.R.*), these books may have been my first full realization that

roleplaying games didn't have to be limited to killing dragons.

And they were fun.

I asked Steve Jackson (the one from the US) what he thought about these books, and he said, "I liked those books, and I actually wrote three in the *Fighting Fantasy* series. They're not roleplaying, but they offer fantasy world participation and character development *like* roleplaying . . . and I think they can whet the appetite for real social RPGs."

(For those keeping score at home, the US Steve wrote *Scorpion Swamp*, *Demons of the Deep*, and *Robot Commando*. He may also be the only person in history to ghost write under his own name.)

The *FF* series wasn't without its flaws. For one thing, they were, for the most part, fiendishly difficult. If you didn't follow the one true path -- which generally involved acquiring the proper keys, parts of a password, or safe combination -- you were going to lose at the end. (And it was usually in the next-to-last paragraph, too. . . "If you have these three keys, turn to 400. If not, you die!"). And combat was random, so even if you *were* following the one true path, you could still die. Ironically, both of these elements also greatly influenced my GMing style (remind me to elaborate in the future).

Also of note were the *Sorcery* series -- a series of four interlinked paragraph books where events from earlier volumes influenced events of the latter books -- and the *Lone Wolf* series, where your character could evolve throughout the series . . . twenty-one books, if memory serves (with other spin-off and new series). This was, perhaps, my first continual attachment to a single character.

In my youth I was a fan of wargames. But I honestly believe that a steady appetite of these books fanned the embers of what eventually became my passion for roleplaying games.

For folks interested in more information, perhaps the best site I can offer is:

www.fightingfantasy.com

Of particular note, especially for those unfamiliar with these books, is the "amateur" section (http://www.fightingfantasy.com/ffgame.htm). There you can get full, honest-to-goodness, amateur *FF*-style gamebooks. Some of them are even full-blown 400 or 500 paragraph efforts . . . all free!

If I were a betting man, I would guess that many of the next generation of roleplayers will be brought to our hobby through computer games. And I'm not sure how I feel about that; there are many elements of which paper-and-pencil roleplaying games simply cannot compete with their silicon counterparts.

I also don't know if these books will ever make any kind of comeback; in the HTML-age, it seems their hyperlinked counterparts, complete with flashy graphics and automatic dice-rolling, could easily overshadow any paper efforts. But I know that, should I need to introduce any future gamers to roleplaying, I could do worse than give them a copy of *Scorpion Swamp*.

* * *

As of Wednesday, I now have a sink. Or perhaps I should say:

> 1D6 Transform (Air into Water)
> (Variable Special Effects: generate hot/cold water at various pressures) (OIF, Universal, Immobile, Breakable, Fragile) (6 points)

(Or as the **GURPS**ians call it, "Sink.")

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: **Marvel Super Heroes Basic Set** RPG (*Campaign Book*), p. 10-11.

(Three stars) "United Arkansas Milita overpower invaders in the Boston Mountains. Retreat all invaders from the territory; destroy unretreatable units."

Pyramid Pick

The Swashbuckler's Handbook (for Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade)

Published by White Wolf Game Studio

Written by Phil Masters, Phil Brucato, and Rebecca Moss

128 pages, $18.00

Most games -- not to mention literature and drama -- are about conflict, and the simplest form of conflict to create is violence. More than any other reason, that's why so many roleplaying games place such a high premium on combat. It's not that most game designers are lazy or that most gamers are stupid; it simply takes a rare combination of astute writing, clever players, and lots of examples to make other forms of conflict at all viable in a roleplaying setting. The somewhat misnamed *Swashbuckler's Handbook* (perhaps "Courtier's Handbook" lacked a certain flare) provides two of these three ingredients in great quantities. You need only find a group of appropriately cunning players to add seduction, guile, and treachery to your *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade* chronicle.

Subtitled "High Adventure and Intrigue for *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*," *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* focuses on the social side of conflict. As the book's introduction makes clear, the purpose of this book is "to show Storytellers and players how to run chronicles in which a poisoned cup is just as fearsome as a fireball -- and often far more effective in the long term." Thus the book is a guidebook to the potent combination of sex, violence, and intrigue that make the Renaissance such a wonderful environment for gaming.

Physically, *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* is an attractive volume with an easy to read layout. The interior art is uniformly excellent, most notably Jeff Holt's chapter-opening pieces and Mark Jackson's character sketches. While there were a few too many bare breasts among the illustrations for my taste, their frequency is definitely sub-par for a White Wolf product, especially when one compares it with many *Kindred of the East* supplements.

Besides the aforementioned introduction, *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* includes four large chapters and an appendix. The first chapter, "The Age of Masks," is a nice overview of Renaissance history, concentrating on Europe (of course) but with useful snippets on other places. The chapter also covers political and religious hierarchies, the role of women, fashion and etiquette, along with a host of other topics. It's also reasonably complete (at least for gaming purposes) without being dry, which is a good quality in a historical supplement.

Chapter two, "Masters of the Danse," describes the various *Mage* groups most likely to be involved in swashbuckling adventure and intrigue. Each group is treated in detail, giving insights into their organization, philosophy, sub-groups (if any), and their perspective on magick. The chapter also includes a wide variety of archetypal characters, each one given a Shakespearean-inspired tag, like "Macbeth: The Driven Usurper" or "Hamlet: The Thinking Prince." If I have a complaint about *The Swashbuckler's Handbook*, it's that it includes too many Elizabethan era references, which are over one hundred years out of period for *The Sorcerers Crusade* (officially set in 1451). It's a minor point, I'll admit and often, as with the archetypes, serves a good end, but I'd have preferred more genuinely in-period references. Chapter two rounds out with short biographies of several important Mages of the age.

Chapter three, "Hearts and Blades," discusses a magical courtier's most important tools. The first is the Ars Cupiditae ("the Art of Desire"), a regimen of philosophy, swordsmanship, and social skills based around the classical seven liberal arts. Chapter three gives an extensive overview of the Ars and how to use it in a Sorcerers Crusade chronicle.

There are also details on using magick both in court and while fencing, as well as some very useful new Backgrounds, Talismans, and Machinae. Even duplicitous devices like poison rings, forged papers, and handheld crossbows make an appearance, providing a courtier (or "floreatus" as The Swashbuckler's Handbook calls him) with even mundane tricks to add to his repertoire.

Chapter four is entitled "Honeyed Words and Bitter Poison" and ties up the previous three nicely, offering a wealth of advice on running a court-based chronicle, complete with cross, double-cross, and passions aplenty. Much as they did with character archetypes, the authors label their classic plots with Shakespearean titles as kind of literary shorthand. Thus, "The Romance of Personal Tragedy" is associated with "Romeo and Juliet," while "The Drama of Politics" is connected to "Coriolanus," and so on. There's also a discussion of "Classic Bits and Clichés" that collects together certain standard scenes and themes that run through court-based and swashbuckling stories. It's a very useful idea mine for Storytellers looking to add that air of authenticity to their own games.

The Appendix provides information on swashbuckling techniques and fencing maneuvers for White Wolf's Storyteller system, which is one of the few times in which the book actually lived up to its otherwise inappropriate title. There are several "Lost Appendices" as well, which were cut from the book for space considerations. White Wolf has kindly made them available online at http://www.white-wolf.com/Games/Pages/swashbucklers.html for those who wish to view them.

In the end, *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* is a worthwhile addition to the library of anyone who plays *Mage: The Sorcerers Crusade*. It's also a worthwhile purchase for anyone looking to add courtly intrigue and deception to their games, especially those set during the Renaissance. This supplement does a fine job not only of describing what's involved in a courtly setting, but -- more importantly -- how to use the information it gives you. That's a rare thing and one I can't recommend more. But for a few minor blemishes, *The Swashbuckler's Handbook* is a well-nigh perfect treatment of its subject matter in a gaming context. Bravo!

-- James Maliszewski

by Mike Mayer

Art by ArtToday

It's hard to have a spontaneous roleplaying experience. Adventures must be planned in advance, mountains of rules must be absorbed, remembered, and correctly used. It's not something that happens on a whim.

Except!

Recently, archaeologists have stumbled on some stone tablets that describe an ancient system of roleplaying enjoyed thousands of years ago by our ancestors. It's called Yes Or No Adventures and it has some advantages over current roleplaying systems. In YONA, Game Masters are not required and planned adventures are unnecessary. YONA may be played on its own or combined with other roleplaying systems. And YONA may be played at a table, in a car, or even an Internet chatroom.

Like all roleplaying games, YONA is a game of cooperative storytelling. However, unlike most others of its kind, the creation of a YONA adventure takes place at the same time the players interact with it. Nothing needs to be worked out in advance, as everything that happens in a YONA adventure springs from the players' spontaneous invention.

The basic rules are simple. Players work together to author an interactive story, and each player takes turns expanding on the story from his point of view. Whatever the particular situation, the Lead Player declares what his character is doing and how the action affects the fantasy world created thus far. The other players then ask the Lead Player "yes or no" questions about what he described. The questions and their answers introduce new elements that are incorporated into the continuing story. After the questions are dealt with, the lead passes to the player on the left, who continues the story from his point of view.

Theoretically that's all there is to it. In practice, however, there's a little more to know.

To give you an idea of how a YONA session works, look at the example below. The scene takes place in a medieval-style world, though a YONA adventure may occur anywhere.

John (Lead Player): "I pry open the stone-cold door that blocks the end of this passage, using the handle of my mace as a wedge. It takes all of my strength to . . . the lock snaps, a sudden pinging sound, and the wood of the frame splinters around the deadbolt as the door pops open. I look through the crack and see a vast space. An azure light greets me and I hear something humming. Nudging the door further open, I acclimate to the glare and see a cavern stretching before us. A forest of spiraling columns grows from the floor and reaches only a fraction of the way to the distant ceiling. I think I smell incense. The hum fades, yet blue light still ripples throughout the room."

Melissa: "Is someone here?"

John: "Yes."

Beverly: "Does this someone notice us?"

John: "Yes."

Wayne: "Is it the lost king ready to offer us seasoned boar's meat?"

John: "No."

(The lead passes to the player on the left.)

Melissa (Lead Player #2): "I enter the chamber and listen to my footsteps echoing among the forest of columns. The columns aren't made of stone or wood, I believe. They look as if covered with scales, like they're the spiny protrusions of some impossibly large beast. You're right, John, that's incense we smell. I believe the odor is leaking from the cracks in this tiled floor. When I brush my hand over the tile, my palms tighten as if drying out. Is that breathing I hear coming from above? Look at the top of the center column. I see an old man with more hair than clothes. His eyes are the source of the light. Yes, now that he realizes we know he's here his pupils blaze."

Beverly: "Is he wearing the black pentagram of the Destroyers?"

Melissa: "Yes."

Wayne: "Is he clutching the scythe missing from Nauja's temple?"

Melissa: "No."

John: "Are you flashing back on that time that Destroyer priest nearly cut off your arms to teach you a lesson?"

Melissa: "Thanks for reminding me. Yes."

(The lead passes.)

Beverly (Lead Player #3): "As I near his column, the old man starts to laugh and spreads his arms, or rather -- he uncoils them. Cobra-like snakes extend from his torso, one from each shoulder, and they writhe and thrash and become more agitated the nearer I come. The floor is shaking. Look how the columns pitch and sway, except the one he stands on. He must be at least twice as big as a normal man. His eyes close and for a moment we're left in darkness, though somehow I can still make out the shape of his pentagram. I fumble to spark my lamp, but then I notice there's light again in the cavern, light of a different sort than before, a feverish sparking. I see that the old man still has his eyes closed, but his arms -- the snakes -- their slotted eyes burst with electrical blossoms. His laughter becomes manic as he leaps off the column and soars down at us."

Wayne: "Do the snakes have fangs?"

Beverly: "Yes."

John: "Are they dripping with poison?"

Beverly: "You bet'cha."

Melissa: "Do I have time to draw my sword before he land on top of us?"

Beverly: "Sadly, no."

The above was improvised on the spot. Notice how each player controls his own character and speaks only for his character. When the Lead Player speaks, the actions of the other characters are assumed. Also notice how the questions shape the events of the continuing tale. When John first described the cavern, he may not have thought of finding anyone inside it, but when Melissa asked, "Is someone there?" she created the possibility that someone was indeed

there. John, liking the idea of someone being there, confirmed the others existence by answering "yes" to the question. By suggesting story elements and then confirming or denying them, the players of a YONA adventure act as checks and balances to keep the story focused in a direction likely to please everyone.

However, the speaking player has a great deal of leeway and it takes a degree of sophistication on the players' part to make the game work. Players must be aware of what kind of story is being created and how to best balance one's personal storytelling vision with the combined vision of the group. Nothing will kill a story faster than if some of the players want to experience an adventure in a sober Arthurian tradition, while the others are going for Monty Python. To keep the game from breaking down, a few things must be sorted out ahead of time; namely the story's Genre, Tone, and Characters.

Yes Or No Adventures

Genre: The most important thing for the players to decide is what genre the adventure will take place in. Will it be fantasy, science fiction, something else? The more specific the better. If it's a fantasy story, what sort of fantasy story? The action-adventure style of *Xena*? The mysterious charm of a fairy tale? Alternately, if the players are familiar with a particular roleplaying system they can choose to create a story that takes place within that setting.

Tone: Along with choosing a genre, the players must decide what tone they will adopt for the adventure. This is not something to be taken lightly. More than anything, the tone defines what elements will be introduced into the story and how they will be introduced. In effect, the selected tone is an agreement among the players of how seriously told and "realistic" their story will or will not be. Will the story have a situation comedy feeling to it? Or do the players prefer the quality of a classical novel? Will a somber feeling color the events of the story or will the story have the random silliness of a Saturday morning cartoon?

This is also good time for the players to decide if they want to allow overt humor into the story, and if so, what kind of humor? Should players be allowed to tell jokes out of character, commenting on the story from on high? Or should the humor only emerge through the actions of the characters? Once a decision is made, the players should strive to uphold it. This is not to say that players are forever chained to their decision. It only means that until the group as a whole decides otherwise, individual players should restrain themselves for the good of the tale.

Characters: Each player should take a few moments to decide what sort of character he would like to play in the adventure and boil that character down to a short description. Players may import characters from other systems, if they like. But whether the characters are imported or created, players should have a fair idea of what their characters want out of life and why they want it.

Each player tells the other players about his character, describing the elements listed above and furnishing his character with a name. The other players now have the chance to further define the character by asking three "yes or no" questions each. These questions should relate directly to the character and give the controlling player ideas of how to round out his character's personality and history. Questions should be asked not so much with the idea of pointing out shortcomings of a character as to suggest intriguing possibilities.

Once the characters are defined, the game is ready to begin in earnest. Choose a Lead Player to begin the story. The Lead Player starts things off by making a statement, answering "yes or no" questions about what he said, and then passing the lead to his left.

Statements: A statement should not be overly long; a minute or so is a good time limit. It may be as short as a single

sentence. A statement should further the plot of the shared adventure by introducing a new element, a new situation, or by making the present situation more dangerous, mysterious, or interesting. Statements should tend to revolve around a goal. The Lead Player should always have an idea of what his character wants at any particular moment and express it in the narrative. This desire may relate to a motive created for the character at the beginning of the game. It may relate to a general goal, such as to explore or survive. Or it may relate to a specific need, such as to grab a rope before falling.

This is not to say that the Lead Player needs to constantly state his character's goal, but the Lead Player should strive to make his character's desires obvious by what he chooses to focus attention on during the narrative.

Players will be the tempted to let their characters do well in the story. As the players are telling the story, there is nothing preventing them from allowing their characters to easily complete their goals, but this misses the point of the game. The point is to create drama by seeing how bad a situation the players can get their characters into before figuring a way to get them back out again. The object of the game is not to succeed, but to succeed after overcoming incredible obstacles and to tell a story about it.

Most of the time things should go from bad to worse for the characters. If the Lead Player is unsure of how to proceed with his statement, he should roll a die. If the roll is 1-5, whatever the particular situation, the situation should somehow worsen. If a 6 is rolled, the Lead Player may describe a bit of success.

The exact degree of worsening or success is up to the Lead Player, though it should fit in with the tale told so far. The worsening or success should never be described as a bit of random luck or a wild misfortune coming out of left field. The worsening or success should make sense in terms of the story and should happen for a reason. If the players are battling a dragon, there is no need to have the ceiling fall on them out of the blue. The Lead Player should find a way to involve the dragon directly into the narrative, perhaps by having his character being struck by its tail.

Questions: After the Lead Player makes his statement, each of the other players asks him one "yes or no" question. If there are three or fewer people playing, the questioners may ask two questions a piece. Start with the player on the Lead's Player's left and move around the table.

Questions should relate directly to what the Lead Player narrated in his statement or build upon a previous question. They should be designed to clarify what was said or suggest new elements to add to the continuing tale. If a question is answered "yes," the information contained within the question becomes part of the story. If the question is answered "no," the information is discarded. After all the questions are asked and answered, the lead passes to the left and that player continues the tale.

Outside of statements and questions, there are a few special situations that need to be discussed: NPC Dialog, Combat, Veto, End of the Adventure, and Advanced Techniques.

NPC Dialog: After the Lead Player has finished his narrative, his character may speak to an NPC by asking him "yes or no" questions, which are answered by the others players in turn. After each player has answered a question (two questions if three or fewer players are playing), or when the Lead Player has nothing more to ask, the lead immediately passes to the person on the left, who continues the story from his point of view. The questions normally asked by the other players are omitted.

Combat: Combat is handled in the same way as the rest of the story. The Lead Player describes his actions and their results, then the other players question him about what he described.

There will be the temptation to win every combat, and indeed, your characters will have to succeed at least some of the time to make their way through the story. However, even the winning participants of a combat often find themselves in a weakened state or in a compromising position. Seek out these possibilities. The more the players keep their characters hurting and ill at ease, the more they'll worry about them, and the more satisfying their adventure will be.

Usually, a player will avoid killing his character, and under no circumstances should a player narrate a scene that kills off another player's character without his permission. Keeping characters alive is perfectly reasonable. In most stories,

the heroes survive and ultimately attain their goals, and this is what makes stories worth experiencing. However, keep in mind that there are many awful things besides death that can happen to a person, and the players should use the worse-than-death scenarios to their full advantage as long as each player's character can still serve as a viable point of view for the narrative. Of course, if a player wishes his character to die, he may direct the story to that end. That player may then create a new character, and when it's his turn to take the lead again he may narrate a brief story of how his new character comes in contact with the rest of the group.

Veto: Every once in a while the Lead Player will say something completely loony. If the other players agree that what was said doesn't fit the tale they may request that the Lead Player take back what he said and try again. The veto power should only be used when necessary, so as not to offend, and the player it's used against should accept the veto with good humor.

End of the Adventure: Like other roleplaying games, a YONA adventure doesn't necessarily have an end. When time is running short, players can direct the adventure toward some climax or simply stop wherever the tale has taken them. Also, the resolution of a story doesn't necessarily mean the end. Life goes on. New stories emerge from old. Old stories come back to life and sweep the characters back into them.

Advanced Techniques: The players know all they need to know to have a small adventure. But what if the players want to sustain an adventure that stretches over many sessions and still remains internally consistent? The best thing they can do is to keep records. Then, when inspiration is lacking, players may review the records to remember what has gone before and what might lie ahead.

There are at least three main areas of record keeping that are useful in a YONA adventure: Goals and Focus; Settings and Continuity; and NPCs. At the beginning of the game, players should decide who will keep track of what. Diligence is the key word here. The better the players keep records, the more likely they will be able to sustain a long and fruitful campaign.

Goals and Focus: The driving force of the narrative will be the goal. Goals help players to hone-in on what their characters could do next and why they're doing it. Every story hangs on its goals and each story may have several large and many smaller goals intertwining with one another. The player keeping track of the goals should stay on the lookout for them as the tale is being told. A goal is something to be obtained. It is usually related to an obstacle that stands between the heroes and their desires. It can be something material, spiritual, or philosophical. It can be a need to solve a mystery, or simply the hint of a possible future conflict. For example, if the Lead Player hints of a legend of a hidden sword, the goal keeper should write it down. Later, when the players are stuck for something to do, the goal keeper can remind the players of the courses of actions available to them.

The purpose of having a goal keeper is not make sure all the loose ends are tied up, but to have a body of information the players may draw upon to give them ideas of new adventures to incorporate into their story. The goal keeper keeps the game alive by reminding the other players of what the story was, what it is, and what it could be. Also, the goal keeper should look for connections among the goals and suggest directions in which the narrative might proceed. By relating goals from past narratives to future narratives the story will stay focused and feel more "story-like."

Settings and Continuity: In the course of an adventure, players will go many places and it won't take long for the players to forget the details. It is this player's responsibility to keep the narrative grounded in reality by keeping records of what is "real." This doesn't mean that this player must write down every detail of every stable and inn the group happens across. However, this player should jot down a brief description of the places they go, and more importantly, make notes on how each setting is important to the story. If there was trouble at the inn, this player should write it down, so that if the characters visit those places again they will have something to look into. This player should view his job much in the same way the goal keeper views his job. Both players maintain a body of information the group may later draw upon for story ideas.

NPCs: It is this player's job to remember the little stories that go along with the NPCs the group encounters. This player should always be on the lookout for adventures and intrigues hidden inside the people appearing in the tale. Even though the dwarf that gave the characters a foul look as they walked the Dark Road may not be important to the story at the moment, this player should make a note of it, so that later, when the story is stuck for a place to go, this

player will be ready to suggest exploring the reasons behind the dwarf's foul look.

It's also this player's responsibility to make sure the story has a villain and suggest how various misfortunes might be linked to villainous deeds. Stories work best when there's an intelligence opposing the heroes. Often, a villain by his very nature will help define the characters' goals and focus the story. This is not to say that a villain needs to be present in every scene, but if the tale starts to sag, this player should remind the others of the evil forces scheming against them and find logical ways to include these schemes in the continuing adventure.

Other Systems and Conclusion: YONA easily lends itself to incorporating other roleplaying systems into its mechanics. Due to the multitude of other systems, it would be impossible to describe how to do so on a case-by-case basis, but anyone experienced with roleplaying can see how mechanics from his favorite system might be incorporated into these rules. Quantified skills could be added in part or whole, and combat could be played out in detail with dice and charts instead of simply being narrated. Alternatively, elements of YONA may be imported into a normal RPG game session. For example, after the Game Master describes a setting or scene, he may allow the other players a round of asking him "yes or no" questions about what he narrated. This would allow the other players to directly participate in the creation of the fantasy world they are adventuring in, making it a richer place as well as giving the Game Master ideas of how to direct the adventure ahead. Experiment and see what works for you and your players. The story is your own after all. The adventure awaits.

by James Cambias and Phil Masters

Art by William C. Eaken

When Steve Jackson Games acquired the license to publish a *GURPS* version of R. Talsorian's *Castle Falkenstein*, they had an obvious problem to solve: there was a full-scale game already out there, complete with a half-dozen supplements, and the new book was going to have to be consistent not only with the specific contents of those books, but also with the feel and "traditions" of the old game. The whole point of the license was that *Castle Falkenstein* is a game with a following, a fan base; losing what made it so popular would have been a mistake.

Perhaps fortunately, the company knew a couple of authors who'd written for both *GURPS* and *Falkenstein*, and we were able to do the job on the timescale that the company wanted. As a bonus, because we had both written *Castle Falkenstein* supplements that had not been published when R. Talsorian Games put the line on hold, we were able to add a certain amount of previously-unpublished material to the mix. On the other hand, that added yet more to the size of the finished project. Even after a certain amount of cutting back, this is a relatively large supplement, and some things never made it into the final draft. One particularly interesting cut item was a discussion of how the parachronic explorers of Infinity Unlimited (from *GURPS Time Travel*) would deal with the unique perils and opportunities of the Castle Falkenstein universe.

Castle Falkenstein and Infinity

The world of *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* is a rich and interesting campaign setting, but now that a *GURPS* adaptation exists, it can also be combined with other *GURPS* material. One obvious, if dramatic, possibility involves the "Infinity Unlimited" setting described in *GURPS Time Travel*. Suppose that Infinity and its corps of Paracops stumbled across *this* parallel?

As soon as parachronic explorers finish surveying the world code-named *Falkenstein*, Infinity would surely wish to keep it secret, for several reasons. First, all "weird parallels" with magic or other supernatural powers are considered very dangerous, and Infinity doesn't want casual visitors meddling with powers they don't understand. Second, the *Castle Falkenstein* world already has factions capable of a form of parachronic travel themselves. The Faerie visit other worlds through the Faerie Veil, and magicians appear to be able to reach other realities. Infinity and the Paracops have enough on their plate coping with Centrum's agents, and adding multiple Falkensteinian explorers with their own conflicting agendas would only create headaches for the Infinity Council.

However, it may be impossible to keep Falkenstein entirely under wraps. The chance to study magic in a world which has already begun to apply scientific methods to sorcery would be very tempting, and technical experts might want to

learn more about Falkenstein's weird steampunk technology, or even the secrets of Engine Magick. Finally, Falkenstein seems to be a whole universe with the Weirdness Magnet disadvantage. Despite Infinity's best efforts, parachronic traders and Time Tours groups may wind up blundering into New Europa. Once word leaks out, it will be hard to ban Time Tours from running package tours of Falkenstein for Victorian-wannabes and fantasy fans. Consider how much people would pay for the chance to meet fictional characters like Captain Nemo and Sherlock Holmes . . . or Count Dracula.

The discovery of not one but two non-human factions with inter-universal travel (the Seelie and Unseelie faeries), and magicians with similar powers, is close to Infinity's worst nightmare: parachronic travellers completely outside their control. The only relief would be that magicians and faeries seem severely restricted in the range of worlds they can reach, and their powers may not work in most universes.

The Falkensteinians also seem to insist that their interdimensional travels take them through a region of "pure energy," the so-called "Faerie Veil," which does not seem to correspond to Infinity's understanding of how parachronic travel works. Perhaps Infinity Inc. technology traverses this region instantly, leaving its users none the wiser, or perhaps the Veil is itself a parallel universe, with extremely unusual natural laws. Interestingly, all the material worlds visited by the Faerie seem to follow the same general course of history, even though their physical laws vary widely. Perhaps the Veil only allows access to a limited number of worlds, or perhaps the Faerie simply don't have enough *imagination* to find weirder alternates.

Falkenstein's numerous inventors and scientific masterminds may be more difficult to control. Once a Falkensteinian inventor gets the idea that interdimensional travel is possible, it's only a matter of time before a jerry-built conveyor controlled by brass levers and powered by banks of sputtering electric cells goes careening across the time streams. The risk isn't so much what a party of stalwart Victorian adventurers might do, but the thought of such a home-built device falling into the hands of the good people of Shikaku-Mon or Reich-5 is enough to give even a Centrum agent nightmares! To keep the Secret, Infinity's Paracops may have to kidnap a few scientific geniuses from their Falkenstein laboratories, and perhaps destroy some manuscripts before their eccentric scientist authors can submit them to the Royal Society. Heroic characters in a *GURPS Castle Falkenstein* campaign may be called in to investigate the mysterious rash of disappearing inventors, and may find themselves doing battle with the fiendish Invaders From Beyond Time!

Infinity's agents may have some trouble learning the true state of affairs in Falkenstein. If they simply stop in the British Museum and grab some encyclopedias to take home, they will learn nothing about such major factions as the Second Compact, the alliance between the Unseelie and the Prussians, or the menace of the World Crime League. Agents in a followup team may well think they are visiting a relatively harmless Victorian parallel, until a Criminal Mastermind or Dark Lord decides to take them captive and learn about their outtime technology.

The Secret Is Out

Once the threat of the Unseelie is understood, an alliance with the Second Compact would seem very attractive, and to blazes with the risk of giving the Seelie too much knowledge. Various Homeline governments might try to befriend their Falkenstein equivalents; in the case of the United States, the extent of secret Freemason control might not be apparent to a casual inspection, and the hidden rulers of Falkenstein America would love to get TL8 weapons from Homeline's USA to deal with the Twenty Nations once and for all. In the case of the United Kingdom, the British Empire of Falkenstein might wish to help its "fallen" Homeline twin regain its rightful position as leader of the world!

The knowledge that their world is considered a quaint and old-fashioned place by the people of Homeline could either be a devastating blow to the confidence and optimism of Falkenstein's

leaders . . . or might stimulate empire-builders to seek out new
opportunities beyond the Faerie Veil. On the other hand, the fact that
Infinity and Homeline have almost no knowledge of Magick would
certainly increase the prestige of the various Sorcerous Orders, and it
is possible that the governments of Falkenstein would try to balance
the superior technology of the outworlders with magic.

Falkenstein is probably on a Quantum level inaccessible to Centrum; if not, Centrum's rationalist distaste for magic
would likely lead them to ignore it anyway. However, if they did intervene, they might support the British Steam Lords
and American Freemasons in the quest to construct a rational, English-speaking world government. This would
logically lead to Centrum allying with Infinity and the Second Compact against the Unseelie, but it would probably be
a highly uncertain partnership, rife with distrust and double-dealing. Centrum's agents are dangerously inexperienced
in negotiation with powerful nonhuman beings, while the Unseelie have centuries of practice in tricking and
manipulating mortals. The Adversary might well fool them completely, making Centrum think they were pulling the
strings even as they did exactly what he wants. Once discovered, an Unseelie-Centrum axis would cause Infinity to hit
the panic button, hard!

In this context, hitting the panic button would probably involve overt military action by Infinity and the Homeline great
powers on a number of parallel worlds including Falkenstein itself. The cost of transport would make it impossible to
deploy overwhelming force, but regiment-sized cadres of early TL8 units working in conjunction with local allies
would be a potent force. Gamemasters who like to run military campaigns can have lots of fun exploring the potential
of tanks and helicopter gunships (supported by dragons, flying cavalry and the awesome Verne Cannon), pitted against
steam Landfortresses, pirate airships, and the Wild Hunt!

Pyramid Review

Four Bastards: A Feng Shui Scenario Sourcebook

Published by Atlas Games

Written by Robin D. Laws

32 pp., $8.95 US

(Editor's note: If you're going to be a player in **Four Bastards***, it would be naughty
to read this review, because it contains spoilers. You have been warned.)*

Four Bastards is an adventure supplement for *Feng Shui*, written by Robin Laws, the original game's author. In this adventure, an attack on an orphanage draws the characters into a plot hatched by four men, all bastard sons of the same man, to rule the world through a magical ritual involving blowing up five feng shui sites, one for each element (earth, air, fire, wood, and water). The climax of the adventure takes place on Three Gorges Dam, a colossal project that won't be completed in the real world for nearly another decade, but as Robin Laws points out, sometimes accuracy has to take a back seat to a cool setting.

The adventure opens with the attack on the orphanage, which, in another nice touch the characters discover was masterminded by someone who used to be on their side but was kicked out of the Dragons for excessive brutality. It does not escape Robin Laws' notice that excessive brutality is common among player characters, too. This one incident leads the characters across time and across the globe to foil the plot of this renegade Dragon and his four half-brothers.

The next piece of the puzzle comes into place in the ex-Soviet republic of Baharistan (a thinly-veiled Afghanistan). The characters meet soldiers and rebel leaders and likely participate in the battle to save the feng shui site that has allowed them to fight against the Russian forces for so long. This part of the adventure has a lot of roleplaying opportunities, which Mr. Laws points out is to simulate the pacing of an action movie: all the plot and character interaction up front, with less plot and more action toward the end.

As an action movie, *Four Bastards* would be great. As an adventure, it doesn't quite work, since it relies too much on forcing outcomes to every important situation (also known as railroading). Every battle has a predetermined ending. The player characters have to lose every major battle for the plot to advance. As the fourth feng shui site is destroyed, the characters can do nothing more than watch because the *Four Bastards* have such a high level of chi that no one can stand up to them. This certainly takes less time than the destruction of the previous three sites when the characters can fight but are destined to lose. By the time the bad guys are ready to take out the fifth and final site the characters can act against them with no problems, though.

Halfway through the final battle, there's a huge plot twist that keeps the Bastards from winning. The characters will want to stop the villains' plot now because if they don't the consequences of failure are even worse than anticipated! They're so bad, in fact, that if the characters fail either the campaign has to end or the GM has to call in the cavalry and save the day. The plot twist is so convoluted that in order for the characters (and players) to understand what just happened, one of the Four Bastards has to suddenly gain knowledge of the vast conspiracy that duped the four of them into this course of action as he dies and tell it to one of the player characters.

The idea behind the adventure is a great one, worthy of any Hong Kong action movie. The prose is written in a crisp, clear style and helped by Mr. Laws' humorous footnotes. The cover artwork by Andrew Baker is a bit murky, and the interior art by David White hardly looks like it was all drawn by one man. The quality of the interior art ranges from beautiful, realistic pencil drawings to goofy line-art cartoons. Unfortunately, as an adventure, *Four Bastards* would be

a good novel. By their nature, published adventures tend to have linear plots, but the plot of **Four Bastards** is completely railroaded: the net effect of the characters participating in the adventure is zero, right up until the last scene.

-- Kevin Mowery

Pyramid Pick

Nations of Théah: Book Five, Castille (for 7th Sea)

Published by Alderac Entertainment Group

by Patrick Kapera

128 pages, $19.95

So far, the goal of the *7th Sea* "Nations of Théah" has apparently been to present not only a nation, but a theme in each case. If that is true, then *Castille* has succeeded in grand style. Although the setting clearly owes much to the legendary masked men born in this period (Zorro in particular), the theme is one not of secrets, but of a very distinct dichotomy, one the book uses to considerable effect.

As with every other place and group in the world of *7th Sea*, in Castille heroes are Heroes and villains are Villains and never the twain shall meet. But sometimes, it seems that Castille is everyone's enemy, whether hero or villain. Abroad, the Sea Dogs (Avalon's not-so-secret privateers) hound Castillian merchant ships, and the navy is too busy holding off the Montaigne fleet to do much about it. Montaigne soldiers hold a third of the country. Both the Eisen and the Vodacce (Castille's other neighbors) look at Castille with hungry eyes borne of old wounds, and the Vendel League (Théah's richest organization) professes neutrality while getting chummier with Montaigne every day. Meanwhile, within Castille's borders, the power of the Inquisition grows, quelling anything they deem "heretical" or "sinful." Though most Castillians disapprove of the Inquisition's excesses, given the Montaigne invasion they're becoming progressively more willing to accept them.

In other words, a land in need of Heroes -- a perfect place for swashbuckling adventure.

The book isn't named entirely properly; natives of the country call it "Castillo" (kah-STEE-yo), and tend not to like it when foreigners mess up the name. In fact, Castillians have had to deal with foreigners messing up their culture since before the nation's foundation, which is why they tend to distrust people from outside Castille. That's just one example of the sort of rich detail to be found in the book.

The first chapter of *Castille*, which takes up almost half the book, includes a lengthy section on the nation's history, details on the Vaticine Church, the various provinces and cities of Castille, and many of its customs. But these details aren't all just for color. Though by themselves they make it easier to play a Castillian, or for a Game Master to run Castille convincingly, almost every section has some story seed that a GM can spin into an adventure. However, they're not as obvious as in some supplements (most notably *Avalon*). While this can make a GM's job a bit more difficult, it reads more smoothly.

Castille is divided into five provinces, called "Ranchos," each with its own subculture and prominent family (after which each province is named). Each Rancho (and family) has its own distinct style and flavor. There are also other prominent families detailed, emphasizing the importance of *la familia* in the culture. A character with the Noble Advantage can choose a father or mother from a particular family, which provides a player with a specific advantage and disadvantage. One of these Ranchos has been completely overrun by the Montaigne, and another is only holding out at the southernmost tip. Meanwhile, the central Rancho is racked with strife over politics and religion, rumors abound of surviving sorcerers in a fourth, and one of the busiest marketplaces in the world thrives in the province farthest from the fighting. Heroes in Castille won't lack for adventure.

The culture and religion sections stand in contrast to one another, showcasing the division (and theme) within Castille -

- reason against passion. The Vaticine Church has been a great boon to Castille, providing an explanation for the relatively high technology within the country, but Castillians are the people most driven by emotion in all of Théah, and the Church preaches that emotion only clouds the mind's effort to solve the riddle that Theus (God) has created for humanity to solve. This dichotomy runs through the entire culture (and thus the book), but is clearest when looking at the characters.

Chapter Two is a look at the different characters in Castille, from Good King Sandoval (possibly the most likeable monarch in Théah) to Castille's first female bullfighter. And although it's a fairly short section, it truly shines. Not only are all of the characters fascinating, it includes some of the best villains ever to be introduced in a roleplaying game. Are you ready to cross swords with El Malvado (The Wicked)? Dare you match wits with Cardinal Verdugo, head of the merciless Inquisition? And beware the villain that looks like a hero. . .

Indeed, the teetering balance of reason and passion is most apparent in this section. Sandoval has two advisors -- the vibrant Don Andrés del Aldana (who may be in league with El Vago, Castille's legendary hero), whose advice comes from the heart, and Verdugo himself, who is always coolly logical. The two great villains are Verdugo, who is driven by the logic of his faith to a terrifying conclusion, and El Malvado, whose passion has driven him to madness and revenge. Both are as sympathetic as they are terrifying, and show what happens when Castille's careful balance is lost. A brilliant scientist is hunted by the Inquisition because his use of reason isn't acceptable to them, while the first *matadora* is being sabotaged by her colleagues out of jealousy, but her passion refuses to die. Every one of these characters is an entire series of adventures waiting to happen, and just plain interesting as well.

The third chapter is the now-standard package of new skills, packages, and toys for players and Game Masters alike. All are well-balanced and most are fun. The Destiny Spread (a Tarot layout for new Castillian characters) returns, using the Cups and Swords suits. There are several new Backgrounds, skills, and weapon schools, all especially appropriate to Castille. (Would-be Zorros and Joneses will especially like the Whip skill and the accompanying "Zepeda" school of fancy whip tricks.) The new sorcery style, "El Fuego Adentro" (The Fire Within, according to the book), is clearly a reflection of the fiery Castillian nature. While a bit more powerful in combat than the other magic powers, it doesn't provide as much versatility as other magic, and using it openly will get a Hero in a lot of trouble very quickly, since the Church supposedly stamped out Fuego sorcerers a long time ago. New advantages include accents, finely-made swords (Castillian blades are the best "normal" swords in the world), extended family, being an *alcalde* (sheriff), and even being blessed by Theus himself. Finally, the new equipment (like the cloak and whip to go with the skills of the same names) and rules for building fortifications round out the chapter. It takes getting this far to find fault with the book; presumably, the Fortification Rating works with the advanced mass combat rules--which are found in the *Eisen* book.

The final chapter contains the usual roleplaying suggestions, which are excellent, and the Game Master's secrets about the characters from Chapter Two (and some of them are doozies) as well as the few monsters to be found in Castille. The only apparent editing error is in this chapter, as well -- a missing word in an unfortunate place. In the rear of the book is a city map, diagrams of two ships, and four ready-to-play characters.

There is very little fault to find in the book itself. As usual, most of the art is excellent, with a few pieces that are mediocre at worst. The fiction pieces that have become a staple of splat books are well-done without being overdone. The biggest problem is what *isn't* in the book -- advanced rules, or at least suggestions, for handling battle scenes really should have been included in *Castille* somewhere, especially given the presence of rules for building defenses. More egregious is the virtually total lack of information on El Vago and his organization, Los Vagos. On page 126 of the *Game Masters' Guide*, it says (when describing Los Vagos) that El Vago's identity will be revealed in the *Castille Sourcebook*. While there are hints about the secret of El Vago/Los Vagos, the organization most dedicated to preserving Castille is almost completely ignored, and the promised revelation is not present. Presumably, all will be revealed in the *Los Vagos Secret Society* book, which is appropriate, but some information on this pivotal group would have been appropriate.

Even given these omissions, *Castille* is a fantastic addition to any *7th Sea* fan's collection. Whether playing Castillian Heroes who want to defend their family and homeland or foreign Heroes visiting the land of passion, this book is perfect for anyone embroiled in the cauldron of contradiction that is Castille. Keep your steel sharp, your mind keen,

and your blood hot, because the battle of icy faith and fiery emotion has just begun.

-- Peter Flanagan

A Small Task

by Anthony W. Roberson

Art by Shea Ryan

As an introduction to *GURPS* (and perhaps roleplaying games in general), *GURPS Lite* is unparalleled. It is lacking, however, an introductory adventure. "A Small Task" is a short scenario created for just that purpose. It is based in a fantasy setting and designed for 4-6 players and a Game Master. You should be able to play through it in one evening and it is appropriate for new players and gamemasters alike.

Gamemaster Notes

If you want to run "A Small Task" for fewer players than the suggested 4-6, you can reduce the number of goblins in the ruined tower and/or replace the shaman with a leader that has the same stats as the other goblins.

A Small Task

If you want to run the adventure for a larger group, you can add goblins. You should also have them act as intelligently as possible in combat. They will use cover, retreat when appropriate and pursue fleeing foes. Simply treating them as intelligent opponents and not just as targets for the players' weapons will go a long way toward increasing the challenge level of the adventure.

If things go horribly awry for the players, remember
that a character must be reduced to at least -HT before being in danger of actually dying. Also, a healer in the village can heal 1d-3 hits per character with her First Aid skill. The goblins will also keep any unconscious characters alive (at least for awhile) in order to ransom them or sell them as slaves.

Prelude

The players' characters are all residents of Fairvale, a small farming village. One sunny day, they are called before the village leader:

> "Greetings and welcome. I asked you here today for the purpose of undertaking a service for our good hamlet. It seems as though sheep have been disappearing from the north field. I want you to find out what has been happening to them and either return the sheep or destroy the danger to them. Do you accept my small task?"

If the players accept the village leader's task (and they should or this will be a short adventure), he congratulates them on their heroism and wishes them good luck on their task.

Gathering Clues

The players will probably want to start their investigation in the village, gather any information about the disappearances that they can and interview any possible witnesses. The village leader can tell them that the last sheep were discovered missing two days ago and the shepherd that was guarding them at that time is named Jonus.

The players can locate Jonus in the village's only tavern. He tells them that two sheep were taken. They went missing over night. He noticed nothing out of the ordinary. If they press him further, he will say that he did feel sort of dizzy and disoriented at one point and almost forgot where he was. He says, "it was almost like I lost me head for a bit. I felt plumb odd, I did."

The players can pick up several other pieces of information in the village. A total of twelve sheep have disappeared over the past month. All were taken at night and none of the other shepherds ever noticed anything out of the ordinary. They can also find out from several of the older residents that ten or fifteen years ago, a vicious troll stole several sheep from the same area and even killed a shepherd. A band of adventurers eventually tracked him to a cave that lies in the forest about half a day's walk west of the north field and killed him.

The North Field

If the players want to explore the north field, Jonus can easily direct them to the spot where the last two sheep were taken. If any player wants to try his Tracking skill and makes his Success Roll, he discovers several sets of booted footprints leading off to the north.

Once located, the tracks are easy to follow and require no more Tracking rolls. They lead into a group of low hills about two hours' walk north of the field. The trail disappears as the players reach the rocky ground at the edge of the hills, but the players immediately spot a small ruined tower situated on top of the largest hill.

Gamemaster's Note: If you want to make the players' task easier, you can simply rule that they locate the tracks without a roll.

The Old Cave

If the players wish to explore the old cave, they easily locate it just inside the large wooded area to the west of the North Field. If they cautiously approach and everyone makes his Stealth roll, they hear the sound of someone or something snoring loudly as they approach the entrance to the cave. If they enter, they find an old Stone Troll sleeping soundly on a pile of filthy rags and furs. If the players attack the troll and do not kill him immediately, he will beg for his life and will not attack, only defending himself and backing into the corner of the cave.

If the players do not approach cautiously or fail their Stealth rolls, a voice will boom out of the cave: "Go away. Me not want hurt you. Leave Old Ben alone. Go away." If the players enter anyway, Old Ben will again only defend himself.

If the players spare Old Ben's life, he will tell them that he has not stolen any sheep. This is backed up by the fact that the only bones in the cave are of small forest animals like squirrels and rabbits. He can tell them though that someone has moved into the Ruined Tower that lies in the hills to the northeast and they might want to check there. He got this information from a talking raven that knows the

Maps

[A Small Task](#)

[Map of the Fairvale area [10K]](#)

Old Ben

Old Ben is a rather pathetic specimen of a troll. He is almost toothless and missing his left eye. He is also crippled with arthritis and moves only with great difficulty. He has lived in the cave alone since a group of adventurers killed his mate many years ago. He hid in the woods until they left and now only rarely ventures out to hunt small game with crude snares and traps. He has nothing of value to the players and wishes only to be left alone.

ST: 18
IQ: 6
DX: 10
HT: 20

Speed: 7.5 **Move:** 7
Dodge: 7 **Parry:** 5

Advantages: Toughness (DR 2)

Skills: Club-10, Traps-10

Equipment: Big Club (cr 3d+2)

area well. He does not know who or what has taken up residence in the tower.

The Ruined Tower

The tower sits alone on top of a large hill. There is little vegetation surrounding it and it appears that any approach would be easy to spot. The tower itself is largely tumbled down and it appears that only the bottom floor and a small portion of the upper floor are intact.

A group of eight goblins led by a shaman has taken up residence in the tower. During the day, all the goblins will be located in the tower with one stationed on the remains of the upper floor to act as a sentry. At night, half of the goblins and the shaman will head south to steal sheep, while the rest remain to guard the tower.

If the players try to approach the tower in daylight, they make their Stealth rolls at a -4 penalty. Failure indicates that the goblin sentry spots their approach. If they wait until nightfall, there is no modifier to the rolls. If they approach at night, they will also see flickering light from inside the tower and smell a wood fire.

If the sentry spots the players' approach, he will sound the alarm and the other goblins will quickly take up defensive positions on the first floor. The goblins will take the time to flip over tables for cover, bar the door and fire their bows from the tower's arrow slits. The player's should have a very tough time of it if they try a frontal assault.

If the players decide to wait some distance away from the tower and watch, they will notice no activity during the day. About two hours after nightfall, however, they will see a group of five goblins leave the tower and head south. This group can be surprised and ambushed with a good plan.

In battle the goblins will rely on their bows as long as possible. They will also concentrate their attacks on the most lightly armored characters. The shaman will use her Daze and Haste spells to good effect.

If the battle is going poorly for the goblins and at least half have been killed, the shaman will attempt to parley with the players. She will promise to leave the area and not return in exchange for their lives. If the players agree, she will leave for the time being, but the players may very well run into her again in the future!

Once the goblins have been destroyed or forced to leave the area, the players are free to search the tower. They will find four sheep still alive in a small pen on the first floor. The goblins have no treasure other than what the shaman carries.

Aftermath

The village leader will be greatly pleased if the players manage to drive off or kill the goblins and return the stolen sheep. He will congratulate them in a ceremony before the entire village and hold a feast in their honor. He will also present each with a fine riding horse in exchange for their deed of service.

Each character should be awarded 2 character points if the players successfully return the sheep and deal with the goblins. 1 point should be deducted if they needlessly killed Old Ben. A maximum of 2 additional points should be awarded

Goblin

ST: 11
IQ: 8
DX: 12
HT: 10

Speed: 5.5 **Move:** 5
Block: 6 **Dodge:** 5 **Parry:** 6

Advantages: Toughness (DR 2)

Skills: Bow-13, Shortsword-12, Shield-12, Stealth-13

Equipment: Short bow (imp 1d-1), Shortsword (cut 1d+1), Small shield and Light leather armor (PD 3, DR 1)

Goblin Shaman

The shaman is quite smart for a goblin and she has brought her little band to the ruined tower in order to try and set up her own tribe. She has been leading the raids on the North Field. The goblins sneak close to the flock and she uses her Daze spell on the shepherds so that the others can steal sheep for food. She has carefully avoided confrontations with villagers so far in order to keep the goblin's presence a secret. Once the goblins have a base established, she intends to try and attract more followers and eventually attack the village itself.

ST: 10
IQ: 12
DX: 11
HT: 10

Speed: 5.25 **Move:** 5
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 5

for exceptional play and/or clever ideas.

Further Adventures

If the players want to continue adventuring with Fairvale as their base, here are some adventure hooks that you can use as the basis for future scenarios.

- A giant wanders into the area and decides to stay for awhile. He eats sheep, tramples crops and basically does as he pleases. He is *so* big, however, that simply attacking him would be very difficult and probably fatal. The players are going to have to find some other way to convince or force him to leave.
- A villager's plow breaks open the roof of a long forgotten tomb. The players can explore it to discover the riches (and dangers) that lie inside.
- If the goblin shaman escaped or the players allowed her to leave, she returns with another band of followers. This time, in addition to terrorizing the village, she is seeking revenge on the players' characters for her earlier defeat.

Advantages: Magery

Skills: Staff-11, Tactics-12

Spells: Daze-13, Haste-13, Lend Strength-13, Lend Health-13, Minor Healing-13

Equipment: Staff (1d)

The goblin shaman wears a necklace that is strung with large gold nuggets. It would be worth $5,000 to the right buyer.

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Thank You, and Welcome

*(Editor's warning: I use the phrase "Thank you" twelve times in this column. This is **not** the "Obligatory Thanksgiving Column," mandated by federal law for all weekly columnists since 1863. You won't be spared. We apologize in advance.)*

Thank you, Dennis, for subscribing. I'm sure you would have at some point even *if* you hadn't been forwarded my public shunning by a friend, but this may have hastened the process. And since you're such an understanding friend and GM, I just *know* that the Acid Pit of Serverus I currently find my character trapped in is a passing phase, and not some petty retribution. Or if not, I know you'll let my new character be one of the cool alien races from *Star Crusades 2*.

Thank you, Melissa, for agreeing to join our *Star Trek* game back in '93. You were a *Star Trek* fan, but you'd never heard of roleplaying. Nonetheless, you were a welcome and wonderful addition to that campaign.

Thank you, Phil, for knowing about *Talisman*. When I saw this goofy game in the used bin at our FLGS, and I'd never heard of it, I asked you if it was worth it. You nodded vigorously, and you were right. That game provided many evenings of fun, despite hour-long debates and questions. (No, I *still* don't believe you can put the horse in the bag, despite the fact they're both objects.)

Thank you, Dave, for being a good sport about my need to kill you. You were roped into that first fateful *Supers* game, not because you were a gamer (I don't think you were), but possibly because my youthful Mountain Dewed enthusiasm seemed more exciting than the nothing that was currently on-tap for Friday nights. Unfortunately you made a *GURPS Psionics* character in a *Supers* world, and were thus too powerful to live. Your new character was just as cool as your original, while still being a bit more balanced.

Thank you, Colin, for playing a game that was wildly different from what you were used to. I know my gaming style was wildly different from the *Dungeons and Dragons* you were used to, but I still look back on that diceless session with you as a lawyer defending your client -- and by extension, humanity -- as one of the most memorable moments of that campaign.

Thank you, Amber, for inviting me to the modern LARP *Vampire* game. I was amazed at how nice everyone was to the newbie who had been playing *Vampire: The Dark Ages* too long, and thus had a penchant for inappropriate "thees," "thous," and "whilests." It was fun.

Thank you, Jim, for introducing me to *Axis & Allies*. I was terribly young, and I'm sure you didn't understand the top secret British "Spend All Our Money On Submarines" scheme, but you were very patient and understanding.

Thank you, Ms. Osborn, for having *The Warlock of Firetop Mountain* as part of the classroom's library. It was a favorite of many lunchtime discussions, trying to figure out who had *really* found the right three keys, and who was only faking.

Last week I started down the path of thinking about introductions to games; this week I continue it. Our hobby (or hobbies, depending on how divisive you're feeling) is built on friends. If you were an alien from Delta Cephei, and came to our planet in search of the powerful psychic networks that advertised their might through broadcast to the stars, and were looking for something to do once you obliterated them, the odds of you stumbling across any form of gaming as a hobby are slim. Golf, Bridge, cooking, coin collecting, crossword puzzles, movies . . . these are all hobbies you could conceivably stumble across by reading a newspaper, watching television, or otherwise experiencing the world. But most nice aspects of our fair hobbies (the ones that don't involve someone sad doing something sad and happening to have a copy of some game) are well-hidden, at least to the casual observer.

Which, for the most part, means that friends and acquaintances will quite probably remain a vital, if not primary, part of introducing new people to the hobby for the foreseeable future. Many won't like the hobby, in the same way that

many people try golf, Bridge, coin collecting, etc. and decide not to continue. But some will stay with the hobby, and it is through this new blood that all of us are revitalized and made aware of new viewpoints and ideas.

There are as many entries into our hobby as there are games to play, and I don't believe any are particularly better than any other. And for each game and aspect of the hobby we love, there's other parts we've never tried, new things we've never experienced, and ideas we've never thought of. We can all be newbies, if we keep an open mind. And we can all make sure our hobby stays healthy by inviting new players into whatever you're doing. For everyone who's tried something new, for everyone who's invited a friend to play something they haven't before, for everyone who's put up a sign in their local game shop looking for players, thank you.

And to the twenty-eight new people who've added in the last seven days who *aren't* Dennis, thank you for giving us a chance. Feel free to [write me](#) if you have any questions or comments. And thanks to those friends who may have steered you to us, too.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Fortress America** Partisan card.

(One star) "Even the In the *[sic]* Darkness There Are Rules. Read and Obey."

Pyramid Pick

UnderWorld RPG

Published by [Synister Creative Systems](#)

Written by Gareth-Michael Skarka

164 pages, $19.99

"Deep below the streets of New York City, there exists a world of wonder and adventure, unseen by those above. Magic courses like blood through veins made from steel tracks and transformers. The Underworld is home to the Homeless, to the Freaks, to the Junkmen, and more. Steely-eyed Bravos hunt their prey in dark tunnels far below the subways, while brave Taggers scout new paths between the varied Domains, and mark the trails for all to follow. Creatures of Legend walk the platforms below the city, and brilliant Artificers build inventions of bizarre science, borne of madness.

"This is a world of heroes and villains . . . of magic and romance . . . of gods and monsters."

Welcome to the *UnderWorld*, a roleplaying game of subterranean urban fantasy underneath the subway systems of New York City.

Underworld is a place of Magic -- the deeper you journey, the stronger Magic gets. A brief history of Magic in the UnderWorld goes like this: as technology became more and more popular to mankind, Magic receded into the UnderWorld. Magic is not a renewable resource -- in fact, it should have been depleted during the Industrial Revolution of the 18th and 19th century. The reason why Magic (called the Radiance) still exists is because of the subway system -- the subways were laid out in an intricate pattern, enabling minuscule amounts of essence to be sacrificed for the replenishing of the Radiance. When you get the millions of people who ride the Subway, the Radiance is at an almost perfect balance.

Here's a breakdown of what to expect of the *UnderWorld RPG*:

Chapter 1 is the introduction. It gives the reader a history of the UnderWorld, sets the framework of the game, and details the single rules mechanic known as the Head Count. This involves is taking a number of tokens -- one is the default, but a player can gain more coins depending on Traits, Skills, etc. -- and tossing them. Every "heads" result is a success, and the more success a player receives, the better he or she did on the action. Simple as that.

Chapter 2 gives us the low down on Character creation. You pick a Breed (groupings of similar types of characters, be it species, race, or similar background), pick a Guild (the occupational organizations found throughout the UnderWorld), choose three defining Traits (the main descriptors of the character) -- one from Breed, one from Guild, and one from any of the lists. You then pick three Secondary Skills that your character might have learned from any Guild list, determine starting equipment, and you're ready to journey into the UnderWorld.

Chapter 3 goes reinforces the Head Count mechanic (being the core of the entire game, it bears repeating), and discusses the various uses of the Head Count system (like Fear and Exhaustion Checks, Feats such as Mental and Strength, and interaction between the Main and Supporting characters). We also get a lesson on the "magical background radiation' of the UnderWorld called the Radience, which is result of subways riding the arcane geometry of the tracks, and the riders giving up a tiny piece of their essence each time they take a ride.

Essentially, the deeper you go into the UnderWorld, the higher the "RadCount" of the Radiance gets -- this can have an effect on equipment (modern tech such as laptops and pistols will soon cease to function in high levels of the

Radiance), magic, Salvage Tech, and characters. In some places, the Radiance collects into sources with a higher RadCount than its surrounding area -- this is called a Radiance Pool, and they are treasured by UnderWorlders for the simple reason that Pools are of great aid in magic and the creation of Salvage Tech.

Chapter 3 also gives us a lesson in Combat (or, as the rulebook subtitles it, "Subterranean Ass-Kicking 101"). There are two types of combat -- Turn By Turn and Abstract. The Turn By Turn uses the Head Count mechanic, but instead of having to beat a difficulty number, the coin tosses are opposed, and the Combat is broken down into 3 turns: Initiative, Attack, and Damage. The Abstract method is best used for the live action game of *UnderWorld*, but can also be used for when the Conductor (the term for the typical Game Master) doesn't want to take too much time with fights against nameless characters. It all boils down to a three coin toss, and whoever gets three head results succeeds. The interesting part about this method is that for each advantage you possess in this combat, you can turn over a coin on either your side or your opponent's, making it a bidding war you have to win . . . or else!

Of course, with every combat, there comes a time for Healing, which is the last thing covered in the third chapter. Essentially, you toss coins and must match the difficulty -- which is the number of Wound Levels the victim has suffered. Success represents one Wound Level recovered (though it takes two days to recover if healed by normal means like First Aid).

Chapter 4 takes us to the mysterious (and sometimes frightening) world of Gifts -- be it Magic or Salvage Tech. Magic comes in the forms of Charms (small objects given power or simple actions that have been taught from generation to generation), Rites (powerful and very rare -- these can alter the fabric of reality itself), and Relics (objects that have the power of Legend or belief into their makeup).

Salvage Tech is the weird science that is the bread and butter of the Artificers Guild. Using junk they have found in the UnderWorld, these Artificers reshape reality to their will (with a lot of help from the Radiance), and create inventions that physical science could never even begin to imagine. Unfortunately, the Artificers are crazy, and the crazier they are, the better they can create Salvage Tech devices. Rules for inventing, lists for Charms, Relics, and Insanities can be found in Chapter 4.

Chapter 5 is the meat of *UnderWorld* -- the setting! Here, we find the Domains (little Kingdoms set up in the UnderWorld -- some benevolent, some not), the Locales (which can be placed anywhere in a particular Conductor's game), monsters (watch out for the Subway Dragons!), important people of the UnderWorld, other possible UnderWorlds, and details of the UpWorld.

Chapter 6 gives advice on how to create and run Supporting Characters, designing adventures and campaigns, the virtues of Live Action versus Table-top play. The author also goes into "Intuitive Continuity," a method which can also be used for any game other than UnderWorld, and contains some excellent advice for Conductors.

Chapter 7 helps those beginning Conductors with the adventure "Beggars Can't Be Choosers," a good starting adventure for the *UnderWorld* game, and includes a Random Seed Generator, which is excellent. Finally there's the Inspirational Sources, a wealth of information for future *UnderWorld* adventures. Check them out, or you might just be missing out.

UnderWorld was a work in progress, in which the details could be tracked down in the RPG.net column "Game Design Step By Step." This reviewer found the entire concept interesting, and when the game was available at GenCon, it was grabbed eagerly.

The only problems are the typos and the chapter titles, which are written in a "graffiti" kind of font which and makes it hard to read. Also, those people who like combat might not want to go that route in *UnderWorld*, for combat be very, *very* deadly.

UnderWorld is a wonderful book -- the setting gives you enough details to provide a Conductor with many adventures, and yet leaves enough room for said Conductors to add on to his or her campaign due to the lack of a metaplot. The fiction at the beginning of each chapter is also very well-written, and coincides with the setting flawlessly. *UnderWorld* is definitely for those who want to adventure in a new type of setting that has some basis in the modern

world. Don't be late catching this train, because it'll take you to a very different kind of adventure.

--Graveyard Greg

Comet Together: Thirteen Years of the Comet

"The Heathen write that the comet may arise from natural causes, but God creates not one single comet that does not foretoken a sure calamity."
-- Martin Luther

Good things always come in threes, and Halley's Comet always swings 'round again for another pass. With those notes, then, here's another Year of the Comet, to follow our first two (or our first five, depending on how we count these things). In fact, it's another thirteen years of the Comet; all thrown together by the mysterious passage in each of the thirteen years of that starry messenger, by the sudden flashes of mystical ley-historical power, and by the desire for a wicked-cool, transtemporal "sidewise in time" RPG setting. If the appearance of Halley's Comet can change history, imagine what it can do to thirteen histories -- at once.

"Time has not lessened the age-old allure of the comets. In some ways their mystery has only deepened with the years. At each return a comet brings with it the questions which were asked when it was here before, and as it rounds the sun and backs away toward the long, slow night of its aphelion, it leaves behind with us those questions, still unanswered."
-- Leslie C. Peltier, *Starlight Nights*

On May 19 (the year remains in dispute), thirteen worlds changed; thirteen epochs under the Comet found themselves occupying the same globe, each in its own region bounded by distant historical neighbors. Across continents and oceans, time shifted, dividing nations and unifying empires with casual (not to say causal) disdain. The thirteen Eras, then and now, in the Year 5 A.C. (After the Comet), have begun to blend into one Age, a time of Post-Cometary Adventure. PCs can be agents of one of the advanced powers (Brasil, the U.S., or the Siberian Soviet), Brasilian arms traders or expatriate Soviet mercenaries, would-be warlords in Europe or Southeast Asia, historians risking their necks for first-hand views of the former past, Victorian (or Roman, or Medici) adventurers trying to carve out a place for their homeland, "normal folks" suddenly thrown into the worst kind of future shock, or terribly unnerved Infinity Patrolmen. Here, then, is the geochronography of Reality Sidewise:

2061

Immediately after the Event, the Corporate States of Brasil put off their cyberpunk squabbling long enough to sieze the Europaspace facilities in Guiana (and Paraguay and Uruguay, as afterthoughts). Although Brasil is by far the most advanced state on Earth, a large number of 2061's foreign nationals (and a not insignificant number of local entrepeneurs) immediately left to become scientific, economic, or military advisers to other regions of the globe. By default as much as by politicking and quick action against vulnerable targets such as the empty steppes of 1531 Argentina, Brasil is now a superpower to reckon with. Brasilian conquest would have been easier (albeit even less pleasant) if a major Brasilian pharmaceutical company hadn't released a broad-spectrum antiviral agent into the atmosphere a week after the Event -- the plagues that usually follow cross-cultural contact and pave the way for invasion would not occur in this world.

1986, 1910, 1758

The United States holds the balance as it desperately tries to reverse-engineer Brasilian fusion technology at Stanford, support its crash-launched space station from Vandenberg AFB, and rebuild its time-jumped territory. It keeps its independence and freedom of action by nuclear blackmail -- much of the 1986 U.S. Pacific Fleet traveled along with 1986 North America west of the Rockies. President Reagan, as it happened, was even in California at the time, so the transition to the new capital at Santa Barbara was relatively smooth. The northeastern chunk of 1986 Siberia, complicating matters, brought a number of Soviet nuclear subs as well -- some of which are still loyal to the Siberian Soviet Socialist Republic. Vancouver and the edge of Canada easily reabsorbed the plains provinces just as the United States reintegrated the 1910 Midwest. Rather more troubling is 1910 Mexico, where President Pancho Villa uses Brasilian laser carbines and G.E.V.s with irksomely capable effect to raid Texas and New Mexico (having already split

Central America with Brasil's sphere of influence). It was the implicit Brasilian threat, as much as the appeals from 1986 historians (and Lee Atwater's clever collaborations in propaganda with Paul Revere) that convinced the eastern states and Nova Scotia (all drawn from 1758) to (re)join the U.S. -- George Washington's election to the presidency in the Year 2 A.C. on a unified party ticket helped re-ratify the Constitution and keep national disruptions to a minimum.

1607

1758 Quebec, of course, loudly proclaimed its allegiance to France, only quailing slightly at the discovery that across the Atlantic in 1607, King Henri IV ruled there. The 1758 Caribbean rapidly cut its own deals with Brasil rather than prop up the impoverished court of Philip III of Spain, who found himself forced to return Portugal to Brasil (and cede Henri's Navarre to France) the next year. Shakespeare moved to Hollywood, only one of the many Englishmen who decamped from James I's depressing Britain for the suddenly-enticing former colonies. Henri IV found himself the premier statesman in Europe, and quickly learned to play the Brasilian threat off for American development aid.

1456

Central Europe, from Sicily to Scandinavia, remains a menage of petty statelets nominally under the Emperor Frederick III, but in reality a chessboard for Henri's France, Brasilian and American agents, and the visionary Sforza-Medici alliance in central Italy. Florentine and Milanese scholars are everywhere, from aerospace laboratories in Sao Paulo to railheads in Williamsburg, learning the "new knowledge" as fast as they can. Although 1986 Soviet AK-74s found their way to every port from Manchu Nanking to Roman Carthage to Inca Quito, the copies stamped out in Pisa and Pistoia are just as good (and have already turned up in several internecine German wars). If they can keep their balancing act going, the Sforza and the Medici have big plans -- especially for the future of nine-year old Leonardo da Vinci.

1682, 1222

Peter (the not-quite-yet Great) has also been reading future histories, and has proved a remarkably effective Tsar for a fifteen-year-old, after overthrowing Empress Sophia thanks to a hero-worshipping team of Spetsnaz. Despite their aid, Peter has rejected the godless Soviet regime, although he gives high placement to any "future men" who prove their worth in his realm, which now extends from the borders of Poland deep into Central Asia. On his eastern border, however, Genghis Khan remains a threat, with his Mongol hordes caught at mid-boil by the 1222 Comet having just completed their conquest of Persia. Unexpectedly stiff resistance from the Romans in (formerly 12 B.C.) Syria and the one tank division remaining in Soviet Siberia have the Great Khan fully re-directed south to the vulnerable Manchu Chinese.

12 B.C., 1305

Drusus Germanicus, briefly in Syria during a Pannonian revolt, found himself acclaimed Imperator by the eastern legions when he halted Mongol probing raid out of Persia. Roman rule extends to Libya, through the Balkans (save for those rebellious Pannonians, now the problem of Drusus' allies in 1456 Venice) and into Armenia. Judea remains under Herod, although the number of foreigners in Bethlehem is beginning to create a problem for civic order -- unlike the confusing but basically sensible American and Brasilian scholars in Alexandria, the visitors to Judea seem irrationally convinced that their God (or something like that) is due to be born there any year now. To make matters worse, the King of Mali (by far the most powerful ruler in the 1305 stretch of Africa running from Casablanca to the Congo) is threatening a jihad against his African possessions unless he convinces the Ethiopian and Arabian tribes to allow Malian access to an obscure barbarian shrine in Mecca.

1835

Southern Africa, India, and China all came through the Comet together, in the year 1835. The Boers and the Zulus both face encroachment from Brasilian advisers "protecting" the Portuguese colonies in Mozambique, and the Brasilian post in Goa threatens Lord Auckland's control of the subcontinent almost as much as the Sikhs and the other suddenly-restive native powers. For whom, exactly, His Lordship rules India remains unclear -- Sir Francis Bacon's presence in Calcutta as Minister Plenipotentiary from His Majesty James I does little to clarify the issue. The Manchu Emperor Tao Kuang has his hands full as well, not only with revolts in Sinkiang and Tibet but with the collapsing Manchu position in the north. Genghis Khan's forces have rapidly assimilated horse-and-pistol tactics (and much to the dismay of the Siberian Soviet, seem to have obtained AK-74s from somewhere), and the Mongol raids push south into the Hwang Ho valley. Currently, the Son of Heaven weighs an ultimatum from the Siberian Soviets -- either he turns command of the Manchu resistance over to them, or they will "act to secure their southern border by any means necessary."

1380, 1531

The Siberian Soviets do, however, need oil to keep their independence -- their competition with Californian oil companies in the 1380 East Indies has rather seriously destabilized the Javanese empire of Majapahit and flooded the local Malay arms markets with submachine guns and assault rifles. Both sides deploy destroyers to protect their oil rigs and mount punitive assaults against the local pirates. Australia, remarkably, remains in its aboriginal calm -- Brasil can't afford the risk of uniting the Americans and Soviets by annexing that tempting real estate, and neither side will permit Lord Auckland to "re-establish" British control of the continent. Across the Pacific, a similar position holds in 1531 Inca Peru -- although Brasil casts greedy eyes on its sole independent neighbor on the continent, an attack would be tricky and would likely provoke joint Soviet-American retaliation. Atahualpa, perhaps foolishly, believes this standoff means that he can avoid modernizing his Stone Age theocracy beyond arming his household troops with the ubiquitous AK-74s. At the other end of the 1531 lobe, the Japanese daimyo continue their civil wars over an island that no industrial power covets.

It's Star Trek, Jim, But Not As We Know It

In the world of television and film licensing, there are only a few properties that everyone agrees would make good games. Such a property would have certain characteristics which would lend itself to good gaming: prominent, but not necessarily main characters, several kinds of possible adventures, a well-defined but not completely described universe, etc. One property that fits these criteria exactly is Paramount's *Star Trek* universe. Almost every game company has a recurring fantasy of taking the *Star Trek* license and releasing a game nearly guaranteed to be a huge hit. Likewise, many, many gamers have set games in the world of Captains Kirk, Picard, Sisko, and Janeway. As a result, the recent news that Wizards of the Coast subsidiary Last Unicorn Games will lose their license to produce *Trek* games to Decipher Games beginning next year is of great interest to *Star Trek* gamers. The popularity of the underlying property and the size of the companies involved make it of compelling interest to everyone. Let's look at this latest licensing news in this month's installment, "It's Star Trek, Jim, but not as we know it."

Some History

Back in the mid 80's, before **BattleTech** or **Shadowrun**, FASA held the license to produce a ***Star Trek*** roleplaying game. It was popular with fans and profitable for FASA, but both Paramount and FASA found the approval process taxing. A roleplaying game, which by definition includes a great deal of canon, or semi-canon, material requires far more effort on the part of the licensor's approval process than nearly any other product. Ultimately, FASA and Paramount parted ways, and RPG groups returned to homebrew interpretations of *Star Trek*. Though many gaming industry pros dreamed of taking over the license, for some reason no one was able to do it, until Last Unicorn games catapulted itself into the spotlight in 1998 with the release of its ***Star Trek: The Next Generation RPG***. At last, *Star Trek* had returned to gaming. Since that time, Last Unicorn has held up the quality of *Trek* material and earned many fans for its take on the venerable old franchise. So much so, in fact, that Wizards of the Coast acquired LUG earlier this year. A few weeks ago at Gen Con, everyone was stunned to read a press release from Decipher Games (makers of the ***Star Trek*** and ***Star Wars CCGs***, among other games) announcing that as of January 1, 2001, they would begin producing *Star Trek* games. But how could this happen, and what will the new games be like? How will this clash between two of the biggest companies affect the delicate balance of the industry? Let's take a look at these questions in turn.

What Happened?

The first salvo in the fight over *Star Trek* came earlier this year, when WotC took over Last Unicorn Games and, by extension, the *Star Trek* line. While it seems clear that control of the *Star Trek* game was a big factor in the acquisition, it was by no means LUG's only asset. In fact, Last Unicorn's biggest asset was (and is) its network of writers, artists, and editors who are intimately familiar with the niceties of working with licensed worlds in such a way as to please their own creative impulses, as well as the licensor's vision, and legions of fans. Though they may not be working on *Star Trek* going forward, and WotC's own *Star Wars* team has already been chosen, they will undoubtedly be put to good use in the WotC camp.

Nevertheless, I'm sure that WotC never expected to lose the license. What opened the door a crack is a standard clause in licensing contracts that requires the license to be confirmed if the ownership of a company changes significantly. Because the success of licensing contracts depends so heavily on the relationship between the licensor and the licensee, this protects the parties against having to work in difficult situations that would not have been acceptable if presented initially. Surely, WotC, especially in view of its relationship with Hasbro, expected that the license would be confirmed. Still, the buyout technically terminated the license, and Paramount would have a chance to make changes to the contract, or refuse it. Somehow, Decipher was able to convince *Star Trek*'s people that the license would be better off with them than in the hands of LUG/WotC. Why were they able to make this case? As they say in the world of finance, follow the money.

Why did they do it?

Decipher is in a difficult position. Before the card gaming boom, Decipher was most well known for producing the popular ***How to Host a Murder*** series of party games. In the heart of the CCG craze, Decipher was able to acquire licenses to two of the biggest media properties, ***Star Wars*** and ***Star Trek***. Their ***Star Wars*** game has been most successful, spawning many expansions to their main game, and several follow-up games in the ***Star Wars*** line. Licensed games, of course, follow the popularity of the main property and frankly, *Star Wars* has been far more successful recently than *Star Trek*. Undoubtedly, Decipher saw an opportunity to leverage its relationship with Paramount to acquire another source of income in a market segment (RPGs) that they had not yet cracked, perhaps as a hedge against further drops in the card game market, or a drop off in their ***Star Wars*** income (about which, more below).

In addition, Paramount must try to protect its own interest. As I have noted above, *Star Trek* has been suffering a slump in popularity recently, no doubt related to the under-performing *Star Trek* movies and *Voyager* TV show. If Paramount gave Decipher a short license (for example, only two years), they might have done so with an eye toward being able to charge a higher royalty when it came time to renew. This higher royalty would be justified by a revived property in case of another successful movie, or great popularity of the upcoming new *Star Trek* television series. Though it may appear a short-term move, this new license may signal Paramount's confidence in the future of *Star Trek*.

In addition, Decipher may be looking to its own future. At some point, Decipher's most successful license, ***Star Wars***, will come up for renegotiation. When this happens, WotC may be able to get its revenge. With the demise of West End Games' ***Star Wars*** line, WotC was able to get the rights to the ***Star Wars RPG***, no doubt in part due to its relationship with Hasbro, a long-time *Star Wars* licensee themselves. In addition, George Lucas himself is a Hasbro shareholder, as a result of Hasbro's acquisition of Galoob, which had given Lucas a stake in the company as partial payment of their license for Micro Machines toys. It is reasonable to expect that Lucasfilm would prefer to consolidate the license further by granting the CCG license to WotC/Hasbro. If this were to happen, Decipher could be severely damaged, unless they had already developed additional revenue streams. Their planned acquisition of FASA might have gone a long way to protecting their future. Now they will have to make other plans. Perhaps another buyout is in the works?

Paramount made the decision to take the license away from LUG/WotC and grant it to Decipher. Was it a good move? Were they right? Like most things, that depends on your point of view.

So what?

Although, as I discussed above, the loss of the *Star Trek* license may not be as big a blow to LUG/WotC as it might appear at first, they are clearly the biggest loser in this situation. They will recover (perhaps even by winning back the *Star Trek* license), but in the short term, their plans will be impacted.

Likewise, the fans could be adversely affected. By the time LUG released its game, FASA's material was long out of print and there were few players using its books regularly. Regardless of the quality of Decipher's products, there may be serious resistance on the part of fans to purchasing new core books and potentially having to learn a new system. (As I write this column, Decipher has not announced its choice of underlying system.) This fan resentment might also result in damage to the whole concept of *Star Trek* gaming. RPGs are not like towels or coffee mugs; when the licensor changes (even if it were to return to LUG/WotC) some fans are lost in the transfer.

The industry as a whole may be affected by this event as well. It is entirely possible that people will be less cooperative with each other for fear that information previously shared in a collegial atmosphere may be used against them. Likewise, the freedom of freelance writers and editors may be curtailed, if companies become reluctant to use people who have recently, or are currently, working with certain other companies. These issues are common in other businesses, but have not surfaced in our little corner of the market with any frequency. This is not yet a gaming industry "Red Alert," but I will be watching carefully as this event continues to unfold.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

How Dead Philosophers Can Liven Up Your Role Playing Games

by Joseph Goodman

Art by Dan Smith

Characters as some role-players are wont to create them tend toward personality without perspective. Having decided on disposition, moral alignment (in the broadest sense), facial expressions, proclivity to verbosity or reticence, and placement on the continuum from civil to surly, sprinkled with colorful ejaculations and odd mannerisms, with perhaps an exotic life story (which always seems to come up in conversation) to "round out" the mix, the character is deemed complete. What is missing is what draws the line between interesting and intriguing: a philosophy.

Considering the ambiguity underlying the word "philosophy," I should clarify myself. What I actually mean is "moral philosophy." Much of moral philosophy revolves around deciding the proper outcome to a dilemma. So does role playing. The two are naturally made for each other.

The writings of renowned philosophers are a ready-made source for extremely detailed characters. When adapted to role-playing, a philosopher such as Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, or John Stuart Mill is a fascinating package. A gamemaster can easily name his Kant "Beloxik" or "Deathmaster" or whatever he wishes, insert him into a campaign, and play him in ways no other NPC has ever been played.

An even greater challenge is to attempt a player character based on a clear and defined philosophy. Making decisions exactly as a utilitarian or Aristotelian would make them puts all of your normal decision-making into question. I find it very challenging to stay within the role of someone whose decisions are completely rational and coherent, a marked contrast to the way most of us live our lives.

If you are willing to indulge the whims of long-dead thinkers, read the major works of a few philosophers and you'll be set. On the other hand, you could save yourself the trouble by finishing this article. I've taken three famous philosophers, Kant, Mill, and Aristotle, and presented them as archetypes for character behavior, admissible in any role-playing campaign. I haven't tried to regurgitate their own writings, but rather have endeavored to explain the way each would act if encountered as a person and not as just another antiquated treatise.

Kant

Immanuel Kant's claim to fame is "the categorical imperative": given a specific situation, you must act in the same way you think all others should act. You may never let yourself be an exception to a rule, and your decisions should be based on duty to rules of action, not the consequences of those actions. Practically this creates absolute dictates such as, "Thou shalt not lie."

The most famous (and most ridiculed) example of Kantian behavior is the "axe murderer at the door scenario": Imagine you and your best friend are gaming at your house. A homicidal maniac comes to your door, axe in hand, and asks if your friend is in there. It is clear that the guy wants to kill your friend. By Kant's standard you cannot lie to the

murderer. You must tell the truth -- "My friend is within." -- even if he dies as a result. Why? Because you've decided "honesty is the best policy" -- and you can't make exceptions to your principles.

Kantian characters follow categorical imperatives. Those imperatives are not based on allegiance, or some view of universal order; rather, they are based on the principle of universalizability (that is, that what applies to one person applies universally to all people). The "I" in "What I do" should be applicable to anyone and everyone in the same predicament. As the philosopher Paula Ioanide put it, "If the rules of morality are rational, they must be the same for all rational beings, in just the way that the rules of arithmetic are." Moreover, it is the will to act, rather than the outcome of the act, that determines morality or not. "If the rules of morality are binding on all rational beings, then the contingent ability of such beings to carry them out must be unimportant-what is important is their will to carry them out."

A Kantian NPC will cooperate with characters not because he agrees with their ends, nor because he is their friend. Those are tangential concerns. Kant acts in a situation because he believes that, given the situation, a moral person must act in the same way that he would wish all other moral beings to act in that situation. He would ally with PCs because they were acting in the right way -- which would only be the case if they were doing just what Kant were doing. There is a sense of duty in Kant, an obligation to obey your principles no matter what. Duty is as duty does; action for any sake other than duty alone is not moral.

So let's say a rampaging dragon invades the town. Serfs and peons run screaming in all directions. It's up to the characters to save the day! Their friend Kant has his sword handy. Does he act because he is friends with the characters? No. Does he act to save the townspeople (a goal)? No. He acts on an abstract principle, in this case probably something like, "In the face of unjust attack, I should oppose that attack." In this case opposing injustice saves the lives of many villagers. It just so happens that the characters are also fighting the dragon, so Kant helps them out.

In another scenario Kant could be making a terrible decision: Imagine if the attacking force is a dozen dragons, and Kant's friends decide to run (urging Kant to join them), so it's Kant versus a dozen dragons. Kant will still pick up his sword and go to certain death, a stern satisfaction in his heart, because of the moral principle that he should oppose unjust attack. (And, in theory, if everyone else in the village were a Kantian, they would all unite on this principle and perhaps beat back the dragons. Instead, the fleeing villagers are probably utilitarians, which I'll describe below, so they run for cover.)

Playing Kantians isn't always easy. You must act in the way that you believe everyone else in your situation should act -- which, until you get used to it, often requires a pause for the "uhh . . . " prior to any action.

Kantian characters correspond roughly to the idea of "honor" as many gamers conceive of it, although there is a huge difference between Eastern honor (e.g. samurais) and Kant: Eastern honor is based on fealty and obedience to a lord, while Kantian integrity is based on laws of universal reason.

The greatest conflict arises because of Kant's absolute conviction in the superiority of reason. All Kantians act based only on their duty to what reason enjoins. Suppose your character's wife is in the clutches of an evil wizard. Do you rescue her because you love her and don't want her to get hurt? Or because you have a perfunctory duty to ensure the safety of your spouse? The latter. Passion is the slave of reason. Love never motivates a Kantian's actions.

When Kantians become your allies, make sure you're acting morally! As long as you act with integrity you can depend absolutely on their allegiance, but the moment you do something that doesn't correspond with the Kantian's duty to reason, his own sense of universal laws might require him to oppose your own immoral behavior. A party composed entirely of Kantians of similar mind is perhaps one of the most reliable parties imaginable, for its members will always act together whether they like each other or not.

The advantage of playing a Kantian character is being assured of morality in the highest sense most of us can conceive of it. Kantians act on principle. Period. What higher morality is there than that? To the casual observer, Kant looks the very model of rectitude; it's only when you realize you have to fight off those dozen dragons single-handedly that you see the downside of probity. It makes for an interesting challenge in role playing, especially for characters who profess

to be moral archetypes.

Mill

"The greatest good for the greatest number of people." Sounds great, doesn't it? But when you get into the nitty-gritty most people are repulsed by the philosophy that espouses this doctrine, utilitarianism, of which Mill is one of the progenitors.

The premise of utilitarianism is best demonstrated by going to your local mall. Notice how everything therein features a price tag. Utilitarianism takes this principle of "pricing" and applies it to the full realm of human life. Everything has a "price" relative to everything else, measured in a satirical term called the util. Prices rise and fall according to the situation. Nothing is absolute, all things (actions, loyalties, principles, etc.) are commensurable, and everything can be "sold," in the sense of being discarded in favor of a better choice.

Utilitarianism is the most calculating philosophy there is. Am I your friend? Only if the benefits of my friendship outweigh the harms. In the theoretically ideal utilitarian world even things such as friendship would have price tags on them, with prices that fluctuate according to circumstances.

The model of a business most perfectly illustrates the idea of utilitarianism. Businesses pursue profit. Model Mill after that: he pursues advantage.

This sounds horrible, doesn't it? On the individual scale it has little appeal to anyone with the slightest inkling of humanity. It is on a societal scale that utilitarianism appeals. To use the oldest argument in the book: What if a governmental decision can save the lives of 1,000 people at the cost of only 10? Kant would never assent to that; no one can consider himself moral if he voluntarily takes even a single life, much less 10, regardless of the consequences. "Thou shalt not kill." For Kant it is the act itself which is moral, not its aftereffects. Mill disagrees. If you look at the world after the government makes its decision, you can either have a net loss of 1,000 lives, or a net loss of 10 lives. Which is better? Most people, Mill among them, would say the latter.

Utilitarian decision making is common in many arenas of life. The catch is that most of us discard such cold opportunism when it comes to, say, friendship and love. The absolute utilitarian does not.

But that doesn't mean he is scum. The scale on which his utils are weighed includes the society as a whole. A utilitarian will gladly sacrifice his life "for the greater good;" the problem is he will also sacrifice his property, friends, and even his mother "for the greater good." The goal of the greater good is a selfish sort of selflessness. It's possible to play characters only concerned with their own util count, but there's no challenge to that. Go for the greater good!

You can see where the conflict with Kantians comes in. In many cases, perhaps in most cases, Kantians and utilitarians will have coincident behaviors. But every now and then the utilitarian will realize that he could kill himself and contribute nothing to the greater good, or live to fight another day. Kant would rather die fighting.

Utilitarianism has no absolutes. Only the goal -- "the greatest good for the greatest number" -- does not change. Do I have the right to free speech? Only it helps society as a whole. If there are too many pornographers, then leave free speech by the wayside.

Mill's original spin on utilitarianism is actually slightly different than what I've presented above, as he believed the value of some things (say, art) was inherently higher than other things -- in essence, that some things were sort of "less relative" than others. This isn't true to the strict computational ideal of true utilitarianism: count your utils, and go with the most.

Everybody's heard, "Everything's relative." We can thank Einstein for the ubiquity of that sentiment, but it was Mill and his contemporaries who got the ball rolling in the philosophical realm. When playing a utilitarian, remember that everything is relative. Be as capricious as the situation. Your decisions are recalculated as their parameters change. Sure, you may have made a promise, but your promise was premised on certain considerations; without those, new

calculations show a better path. Utilitarianism is all about the best resolution to a situation, measured in tangible things like lives and cash, rather than wishy-washy ideals like "honesty" or "integrity."

Allying with a utilitarian is always a risky proposition. Even if he is devoted to the "greater good," that may someday mean offing you. If Mill were to face a dragon with his friends by his side, he'd probably fight. If Mill and his friends were to face a dozen dragons, Mill would run. And if the dragons threatened to raze the town and everyone in it unless Mill skewered two of his friends, Mill would skewer his friends. Kant, on the other hand, wouldn't.

Aristotle

While Mill and Kant offer clear rules for decision making, respectively utility and the categorical imperative, Aristotle offers an idea of life as a whole. It is a very different kind of thought from modern-day morality, and although Aristotelianism is seeing something of a comeback, it takes some effort to get it to fit in a modern head.

Aristotle's philosophy is roughly characterized by three tenets: reason, teleology, and community. It's hard to explain any without the others.

Most important is to understand that Aristotle comes from a world where nothing is relative. There are clear and definite absolutes. The existence of absolutes precludes recognition of universal commonalities. There's a reason Athens kept slaves and subjugated women at the same time it organized its wealthy white males into a democracy. In modern terms of universal human rights this was clear hypocrisy (and worse), but the Greeks had something we don't: roles. You didn't play them; you lived them. You were not born into society as an independent atomic individual; you were someone's son, someone else's brother, and part of a family, tradition, social class, and city. Roles were different, and different people were in different roles; ergo, there was no concept of "universal rights," or anything else universal for that matter. Women, men, and slaves weren't all human; they were women, men, and slaves, three very different roles.

These social roles were enforced by the tight-knit society around them. "Man is a social animal" is a direct quote from Aristotle. There was none of the universal and indiscriminate freedom many of us have. You were given a lot in life from the moment you were born, and you lived that lot.

This is the first rule of playing an Aristotelian character: play your role. This sounds redundant as can be, but it's not. You as a player play the role of your character, but your character in turn must live his role. He can't just be "a warrior." He must have a clear notion of his attachments to his world (family, community, nation, and religion) and the standards of behavior expected of someone of his station. Moreover, attachments create allegiances, and your character must have them, firm and unchanging. The character should have a deep sense of what is expected of him, his place in the world, and moreover, the goals appropriate to someone of his role.

This idea of goals or ends fits with Aristotle's teleological outlook. He was convinced that all things in the world were oriented toward some goal, and the greatest goal was the furtherance of reason. Reason being the exclusive domain of man, the universe was thus created with man in mind.

Concluding that the universe was created with man in mind gives one a pretty strong sense of righteousness. Your character should have this, almost an arrogance as he continually strives for perfection in his role. What makes a Myrmidon warrior the perfect Myrmidon warrior? I don't know, but if your character is a Myrmidon he'll spend his life trying to find out.

Notice how nicely this corresponds to class-based character systems. It's much harder to implement in skill-based

systems. The reality is, in Aristotle's time, with the exception of the wealthiest aristocrats, no one could pick and choose what he learned. You were born into a role, a class in the role playing sense, and endeavored to be the best of that role that you could be.

While this seems to preclude characters from attempting the Renaissance approach to character building -- "Jack of all trades, master of none" -- that's not entirely impossible. Aristotle's image of perfection was a human one (unlike his predecessor Plato). Even the greatest Myrmidon warrior was still a part of his community, not some cloistered "battle-brother." As such he still took part in the public life, raised a family, and supported his household, necessitating skills beyond those of a warrior.

So this gives a clear view of the Aristotelian life: striving to perfect the role you are given within your community. It doesn't sound hard as a model for a character's life. But while Aristotle addresses the big picture that Kant and Mill ignore, he is pretty vague about the details of how to make day-to-day decisions. The idea is to achieve the appropriate measure of virtue by using "practical intelligence" (phronesis). Aristotle's theory of the mean, which is often incorrectly interpreted to advocate moderation, states that within the bounds of each situation you should strive for the appropriate sort of behavior. This is great for metaphysics but not too useful in day-to-day decision making.

It's that ambiguity that makes Aristotelian morality so interesting. You can never know for sure if you're acting morally or not, but you still orient your behavior toward this ideal role model. It's almost like the Army: "Be all that you can be!" But it's not like the choice to join the army. It's an innate orientation. Aristotle believed in an ultimate order, and within this a clear teleology: you're not just choosing to act as wizard, you are physically ordained to act as a wizard should. The question is whether you'll get it right.

Aristotelian behavior always includes considerations of one's standing in the community. Contrary to the American tradition of nonconformity and individuality, Aristotle says you should do things precisely because you want others to think highly of you. You should be very worried about whether your neighbors respect you, because you are deeply rooted in your community. For Aristotle, modesty is a vice; there's nothing wrong at all with making others aware of your accomplishments.

It is this deep sharing and public personality that creates the most binding principles of Aristotelian morality. As Ioanide puts it, "Since all citizens aspire to the same universal good, my 'ought' necessarily encompasses you." A homogeneity of culture creates views not unique to individuals, but shared and thus binding. Therefore, the Aristotelian character sees no reason not to enforce his beliefs on others. "For Kant it would be possible to say, 'Though my community's actions are wrong, I am doing right,'" continues Ioanide. "According to Aristotle's conception of the community and the individual's role in it, this would be impossible." This notion is completely foreign to most Americans.

So what would Aristotle do when the dragons attack? It would depend on all sorts of things. The theory of the mean requires an evaluation of the situation and a determination of the appropriate sort of behavior. This, in turn, depends on one's role. If Aristotle were a warrior, and the dragon attacked his own community, he would defend his neighbors with enthusiasm. What if his friends left him? Well, then it depends on what a warrior is supposed to do. Does the idea of a warrior involve self-sacrifice for a higher goal? Not necessarily, but Aristotle's idea of warrior does depend on the key importance of the community. So Aristotle the warrior might stay to fight a dragon single-handedly if it were necessary to defend his city. Besides, retreating would look bad in the eyes of the community. What if there are a dozen dragons? Well, then the community might understand a retreat.

But with Aristotle you can never know for sure. His moral model is much more about striving for the "good life" than living by certain rules. In Kant's world anyone can be moral, as long as they follow the right rules. For Aristotle, you have to have it in you; you have to be able to make the right decisions. There's no easy recipe.

It's this "good life" that sets the stage for Aristotelian friendship, a topic he discusses in great detail. The deepest friendships, he says, are with those who are not only pursuing the same path to the good life that you are, but are at the same point on the journey. You cannot relate to those more excellent in their role (but you can learn from them), and those less excellent are too base for you to associate with. Casual acquaintances don't have to meet these rigorous standards, but your real friends certainly do.

In game terms this means you're not likely to find Aristotelians adventuring with characters who don't share similar goals, nor those much weaker than they. In fact, if Aristotle's friends left him when the dragon attacked, it's a good bet that Aristotle would hold a grudge against them forever thereafter. Attachments between people are extremely strong in his view. To leave your friends like that is simply unheard of.

The Aristotelian "good life" is not contained in the superficial word "lifestyle" that we use these days; the "good life" is a much deeper view encompassing the whole of a life, both qualitatively and temporally. The ancient Greek view was you could never judge a man happy until he had died, for only then could you evaluate the whole of his life. Happiness wasn't an emotion; it was an evaluation of how closely one approximated the good life. Aristotle shared that same ideal of a life well lived, calling it eudaimonia.

Roleplaying Aristotle is a good way to get out of our own modern perspectives. It is a great challenge to play an Aristotelian character, someone who must always consider a multitude of factors that we often ignore. While utilitarianism and the categorical imperative provide complex but clear decision-making criteria for Kantian and Millian characters, the Aristotelian is never quite sure whether he's on the right track or not.

Further Reading

Almost any moral philosopher can be a character model. If you want to get some really mean types, I'd suggest pursuing Hobbes (his "Leviathan" is a massive justification of "might makes right") and Machiavelli ("The Prince" is a guide on how to be a cold, calculating manipulator). In the other direction is Hume. At the ultimate extreme of idealism is Plato. "To know the good is to do the good," he said, and if you're interested in finding out his ideal of morality, read the *Republic*.

For more information on Aristotle, I recommend reading his *Nichomachean Ethics*, preferably the translation by Terrence Irwin. His *Physics* would interest anyone familiar with fantasy magic systems -- believe it or not, a universe based on earth, fire, wind, and water was in his day top-notch scientific theory.

Mill's treatise explaining utilitarianism is unimaginatively entitled *Utilitarianism*. *On Liberty* will also give you a good idea of his perspective.

As far as Kant goes, I advise staying away from him. Not only did he write in German, but he was a horrible writer to begin with, and translated badly written German doesn't make for a good read. Go for secondary sources. Better yet, take a philosophy class and pay attention to class discussions. That's what I did. I couldn't bring myself to trudge through his own words. If you're foolhardy enough to try, though, I recommend a cold shower and then *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals*. It doesn't matter who translates it; they're all incomprehensible.

by Steve Hatherley & Ralph Melton

Illuminati: New World Order brims with opportunities for negotiating, trading, cooperating, threatening, and back-stabbing. These opportunities offer rich rewards if you know how to use them and develop the attitude that everything is for sale. Deal-making wins games.

Binding Deals: Trades

The simplest form of deal is a trade, in which two players agree to give each other something simultaneously. Trades are the only binding deal in *INWO* and therefore provide a security that the trade will work, even if the person you're trading with is untrustworthy.

Plots, groups, resources -- you name it and it can probably be traded to another player. About the only things you can't give away are your Illuminati and plots that have already been played -- and there are sometimes ways to give away the plots.

Trades don't have to be an even swap. You could offer to use a group's special ability in return for a plot card, or you could swap a Resource for a group. Alternatively try trading for information, for aid in an attack, or just to remove an action token from a threatening group. You might even want to sell a group's ability -- you may find it easier to keep a normally annoying group if your rivals know that they can use its ability for a price.

Start trading early so that the other players become used to the idea of making trades and deals. You might lose out initially, but maybe you will be able to make a better deal later on. And even if each of your deals is not as profitable to you as to the other player, you can make up for this with volume by dealing with every player.

Most players will be reluctant to trade for a card without knowing what it is. If another player offers you a Plot but won't show you what it is, you should assume that it's worthless to him and to you.

Non-Binding Deals

Deals involving almost any aspect of the game are possible, but anything that isn't an immediate trade or requires some future action isn't binding. These deals require trust. For example, promising the attacker that you won't attack him on your next turn permits him to spend more to bring down another opponent, but does rely on you being trustworthy.

The actual details of such deals are only limited by your deviousness. Some examples:

- **Discounts:** "Give me a plot card now and I will modify the dice roll with WITCH if you need it. If you wait to see if you roll badly, it will then cost you two plots."
- **Loans:** Let someone use your Resource on their turn, and return it during the next. You can't do this with a Resource linked to a group, but any other Resource is fine.
- **Powering Cards:** You can't power a card for someone else, but they could give the plot to you and you could then play it for them.
- **Holding Plots:** If someone has too many Plot cards and can't decide which ones to get rid of, offer to hold one of them for him.
- **Favors:** If you have nothing else you wish to offer for a small favor, you can simply say, "I'll have good feelings

towards you." This promise then needs to be worth something, such as the use of a minor action token later.

Threats

People usually trade to get things that are beneficial to them. However, you can also trade to get things that are threatening to you. For example, maybe the player with two action tokens on the Nuclear Power Companies would offer to use one of them on your behalf in exchange for your Nuclear Accident . . . and if you phrase it as an offer, it makes your implied threat seem much less offensive.

If you're about to attack someone, consider mentioning it to them before you commit your attack; perhaps they'll offer you something to choose another target. (And if they're feeling secure in their defense, maybe it'll show in the negotiation.)

Public negotiation can make your threats seem less cruel. Saying, "Okay, I'm Cthulhu, and I feel I ought to attack someone, but I'm not sure who. Bribe me, someone." makes everyone aware that they might be a target, but also motivates them to influence your decision with favors. (And yes, you could be convinced to do nothing . . .)

When all else fails, be blunt: "Give me a plot card or I'll cancel your action."

Be warned -- some players will resist threats automatically, and take steps to eliminate the threat to themselves.

Cards Suited to Dealmaking

Two cards from the *Church of the Sub-Genius* set are designed for making deals. Slackfusion allows you to exchange Illuminati action tokens and Dokstok provides you with an Illuminati action token that you can do nothing with but trade or give away.

Cards that steal your rival's plot cards (such as the Arms Dealers) can be effective in setting up a deal. Force your to rivals beg for their safety -- or offer to deal if one is played against you. Consider the evil joy in saying, "If you help me out, I'll give you back your Goal."

Similarly, the action cancelers can also be used as the basis for deals. Action cancelers are especially good at making threats, but can also be used in positive ways if you are prepared to sell their services to another player.

A few specific cards to get you thinking:

- **MWOWM:** Use MWOWM to grab a discarded plot that you don't want and then trade it to one of your rivals who does want it.
- **Orbital Mind Control Laser:** Having difficulty using a card because you don't have the right alignment? If someone has the Orbital Mind Control Lasers find out if they are willing to use them on your behalf.
- **Red Cross:** Bandages are expensive, so get your rivals to pay for Red Cross when they bring relief to a devastated place.
- **IRS:** If you immediately return the card you "tax" with the IRS, you are effectively allowing someone to draw an extra card each turn. What is that worth?

Fringe Benefits

Dealmaking offers other, less obvious, benefits.

- **Information:** if you are offered Plot cards you get information about your opponent's hand. You can also learn what they're looking for and what they value from how they trade.
- **Forewarning:** if an opponent is willing to propose a deal before attacking you, you can ready your defenses, redirect the attack to a place where you won't mind the attack as much, or propose a counteroffer. Suppose that your opponent is planning to blast New York with three puppets, and though you could put up a stiff fight, you won't be able to defend it. Perhaps you could offer him one of New York's puppets exchange for a minor favor and not attacking -- both of you are better off than you would have been if the attack had gone through.
- **Protection:** someone who expects to get favors from you has a vested interest in making sure that you are able and willing to provide him favors.

Another way to manipulate people: making a deal that results in another player's Nuclear Power Companies cancel a rival's action means that the NPCs will be powerless to stop your fiendish schemes.

Therefore, start dealing early. It's even worthwhile encouraging deals between other players (as long as it doesn't directly hurt you), because it makes it easier to strike a deal when you need it.

Betrayal: Do No Small Evil

Dealmaking in *INWO* provides clear opportunities for backstabbing and betrayal. You can go back on a promise

you've made, use I Lied to break a trade or steal the Plot card that someone is offering with Go Fish. But it's often a bad idea. Once you become known for these things, other players will stop making deals with you (or in extreme cases, dedicate themselves to exacting revenge). The key to successful betrayal is to only indulge when the reward is so great that it's worth all the mistrust and missed deals that it causes.

Cultivate a reputation for keeping your deals -- the spirit and the letter. Adhere to your deals as a point of pride. After all, there's no need to break deals when there are so many other lovely ways to manipulate people and lead them into error . . .

Don't betray people on small things, and don't betray them when you expect them to be able get revenge. If you go back on a deal at the beginning of a game, no one else is going to deal with you all game. On the other hand, people are sometimes quite forgiving of a spectacular betrayal if it gives you victory.

On the flip side, a substantial fraction of the people who will betray you are unsubtle enough to do so at first opportunity. If you make deals early and often, you can draw these people out, and learn about their perfidious habits at a time when you can recover from being betrayed.

- **Go Fish:** If you Go Fish someone who has shown you their Plots to make a deal, people will treat it as breaking a deal. Do it only under the same circumstances that you would break any other deal.
- **I Lied:** Watch for deals that seem too good to be true. According to the [Daily Illuminator](#) during one of the early *INWO* tournaments one player offered his rival $20 to forfeit the game . . . You can guess the rest.

Sharing Victories

Sharing a victory is the best deal you can make.

The proper ethics for sharing victory is to care only about your victory. If other people also win, fine -- as long as you also win. By the same token, if you can't stop someone else from winning, you should neither help nor hinder them. You've already lost -- why spoil it for someone else (who might remember and prevent you from winning in the future).

Occasionally two players win independently on the same turn. It's not very likely, though, because players usually have their best chances to win on their own turn. When it does occur, it is usually because someone has made a desperate catch-up attempt. For example, a Cthulhu player might go on a Disaster spree, or Shangri-La might stretch to play some Kinder and Gentlers.

It's more common for victories to be shared through cooperation. There are a few ways to share a victory that don't leave open the possibility for someone to get betrayed. More often, though, you have to trust each other. Shared victories are easier if one partner holds off declaring victory so that the second partner has a chance to win on a later turn.

There are a few ways to share a victory with a trade. The Adepts of Hermes could trade a group for two magic resources, or the Bermuda Triangle could trade two groups for one with the alignments it needs. Both trades put both players closer to victory. However, most shared victories require some trust to last until the end of the turn.

Examples of Sharing Victory

If two players are trying for the basic goal, one might help the other attack to control three groups from a third player.

If the attack is successful, the attacker would then give one of the groups (or another group entirely) to the other, helping, player -- and they both win.

Several goals depend on power either directly (Bavaria or Bermuda) or indirectly (the groups-count-double goals). New World Orders and power-boosters can be a way to affect a rival's power-related victory conditions without affecting your own. Or use Rewriting History to change the alignment of a destroyed group to help someone attempting one of the destroy/control types of goals.

If power is your only concern, you could trade away two groups in exchange for one of higher power. Alternatively you could exchange a low-power group for a power-doubling Resource, such as the Necronomicon.

The Society of Assassins' secret groups count double if they are more powerful than any other player's secret groups. So if you control a powerful secret group, it could be worth up to four groups to the Assassins -- and you have the basis for a fine shared victory.

A shared victory is possible with Arise! if your "ally" takes your last group in an attack. You can help the attack, and if you organize your power structure properly you can make sure that he gets a handful of groups -- enough to share victory with you. This is super-cheesy, and people who do that sort of thing should be mocked. Better yet, instead of mocking them, use Go Fish to steal Arise! (before they reveal it) or make Arise! worthless with Interesting Times.

Shangri-La

Shangri-La has more deal-making possibilities than any other Illuminati because they don't have to own the cards they use to win. It is easy for two Shangri-Las to win, and you can certainly pack Unmasked and Shangri-La to help sweeten a deal. But there are other possibilities:

- If there's enough Peaceful power in play, Shangri-La should be only too happy to help someone else take over a Peaceful group that would make them win.
- If there's a Peaceful Messiah in play, Shangri-La might give its owner some of its churches.
- Shangri-La should be happy to give the Church of Elvis to Elvis's owner. And in general, Shangri-La should be happy to give away its groups and resources in exchange for boosting the Peaceful Power in play.

The possibilities are glorious.

Opposing Shared Victories

When faced with a shared victory you have two options -- join them or thwart them. (That's assuming you have any options at all.) Your best option is to join them, by any means possible. If you have some way to stop one of your rivals winning, try striking a deal that involves you not thwarting them in exchange for them helping you win too.

If that fails, you have no alternative but to thwart the victory. You may need your other losing rivals to help you in this. You might also want to play the would-be-victors off against each other: "We can thwart you. If you make it easy, then we'll have the resources to thwart the other player, too. If you make it hard, we'll only be able to thwart you, and the other player will win."

Negotiate to Victory

And that's it. All that's left is practice, practice, practice. So next time you start playing, thinking about your trading and dealing opportunities, and negotiate your way to victory. See you there.

Pyramid Review

Blood Treachery (for Mage: The Ascension/Vampire: The Masquerade)

Published by [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by Scott Cohen and Steve Michael DiPesa

$14.95

I don't think I've ever been entirely satisfied with a *World of Darkness* crossover product. I liked *Chaos Factor* more than most people, and I still didn't like it too much. *Dark Alliance: Vancouver* felt like it took a bit too much away from both werewolves & vampires to bring them together.

Blood Treachery is a crossover of sorts, but one that doesn't really forget its source material. It's quite definitely a sourcebook for *Mage*, with all the oddness and beauty that entails.

The story is as such: with their magic beginning to fade and sputter, the forces of the Order of Hermes begin to panic. In that panic, they decide that a good best course of action is to take back information taken by the Mages of house Tremere, when they became vampires.

The Tremere, of course, aren't in a hurry to let their mortal counterparts abscond with their store of occult materials. Hence, the second Massasa war (Massasa is fancy *Mage* talk for 'undead'). The book describes the events of the war nicely. The end (it's more a stop than an end) is satisfying, and the aftermath serves to weaken the Hermetics as well as (hopefully) awaken them to their duties.

The book's format is, to say the least, unique; it is written as a Greek tragedy, with the oracles of *Mage*'s nine spheres acting as the chorus. The play is set with each character wearing a mask, red for the vampires, purple for Mages, purple with red streaks for those Mages who've tasted vampire blood.

It sounds quirky, but the authors succeed in pulling it off wonderfully. The chorus plays particularly well; Forces empathizes with the Hermetics, Time and Entropy watch as events progress as they know they will, and Spirit senses the passing of ghosts and other anima.

The story is told from a number of points of view, including a small adept cabal, several members of House Tytalus, and an elder Tremere who remembers being a mortal Mage (or being a non-undead Mage, at the very least). The war proceeds on, with occasional vignettes to show its effect on other players in the various factions.

My one complaint is that the overly stylized presentation of the war does subtract from the hard mechanical info, or even the "straight story" details. For example, in one sequence, a group of Hermetics encounters a squad of Assamites when both raid the same Tremere chantry at the same time. Another scene shows Hermetics co-operating with Carpathian vampires. There's never anything else on the interaction between Mages & non-Tremere vampires.

This isn't a horrid drawback (you can probably see a lot of possibilities coming from just the descriptions), but I might have liked some info on it in the mechanics section, if only a couple hooks to hang a plot on.

The largest drawback of the sourcebook is, of course, that it deals primarily with advancing and expanding the metaplot (it is, after all, part of the *Year of Revelations* series). If you're of the brand of player whose eyes bleed at the mere mention of the M-word, your enjoyment of the book will suffer commensurately.

There are a few smaller rules sections at the end of the book, detailing the interactions of hermetic Mages with various umbrood. There's also an appendix on the effects of drinking vampire blood on Mages. It's not pretty. Becoming a ghoul is pretty much a one-way ticket to grade A messing up; it also handles a few other matters for vampire/Mage interaction. For example, it describes the ways thaumaturgy can be used to oppose true magic, and how magic interacts with various vampiric disciplines.

My favourite line in the book describes why the magic ritual to turn a vampire back into a mortal will fail at dawn every day. Why, you ask? Because "Vampirism is a curse from God. Can you roll more successes than God?" Somewhat trite, but an interesting way too put across the current status of *Vampire* with regards to *Mage*.

Blood Treachery succeeded for me as a sourcebook. Even though I don't really enjoy *Mage* that much, I loved watching the story unfold. It enforced what I think is a theme that *Mage* players need to experience more often; Hubris can lead you to a **big** fall. Characters who go through the events outlined in ***Blood Treachery*** will probably learn that lesson.

-- Justin Mohareb

Pyramid Pick

Ork! The Roleplaying Game

Written by Todd Miller and Chris Pramas

Published by [Green Ronin Publishing](#)

$12.95, 64 pages

Ork! The Roleplaying Game is all about unleashing your inner ork. That's right, your inner ork. The nasty, brutish, foul- tempered, foul-mouthed belching moron who commits grievous acts of aggression because it feels like it. It is not about the deep metaphysical meaning of being an ork -- it skips right to the part where you fight.

Ork! is targeted at experienced gamers, but only in the sense that it skips the normal explanations of how RPGs work, extensive novice GM advice, etc. They also expect you to have a full range of polyhedral dice (you need d20s, d12s, d10s, d8s, d6s, and d4s), something newer gamers might be lacking. The game itself is simple, and could work very well as an introduction to novice gamers . . . that is, if you want to introduce novice gamers directly to their inner ork.

Ork! character creation is simple. The four stats -- Meat, Bones, Twitch, and Mojo -- are rated in terms of the dice you will roll for that stat. You have 32 points to distribute to the stats, giving a range from d4 to d20. Meat is physical strength, Bones is toughness and stamina, Twitch is agility and quickness, and Mojo is charisma and magical power. Skills -- all 16 of them -- range from 1-5, and are rated in the number of dice you roll. An ork with d12 Meat and 3 levels in Fight would roll 3d12 when he uses that skill; if he has d4 Mojo and 2 levels in Lead he will roll 2d4 when rolling that skill. Equipment is even easier -- just pick one of 4 sets of possible equipment (mostly weapons) and go! Character creation takes scant *minutes*, and because Orks are not very complicated beings, adventures should take only a little longer for a GM to set up.

Task resolution in Ork is based on the idea of opposed rolls. Every roll in Ork! is opposed. Where a typical RPG would have a target number to beat with a skill roll, Ork has the PC dice against their callous god (aka the GM) to succeed. "Such [target number] systems are for the weak, since they allow the GM to show the horrid trait of mercy" is a perfect example of how Ork! handles such situations. Instead, the GM takes the part of Krom, God of the Orks. He decides how much Krom cares if the ork succeeds or fails. If Krom approves, the GM will roll 2d6 (or any other die type he chooses -- Krom is a god, and doesn't have to play fair if he doesn't want to) against the ork's roll -- if the ork wins, he succeeds. If Krom hates an ork for trying -- or the ork tries something really hard -- the GM can roll up to 5 dice against the ork. Contests between orks and other critters -- such as Giant Cockroaches, Trolls, or Squishy Men (read "Halflings") -- are handled in the same manner, with each rolling dice and comparing the results to determine the winner.

Ork! also has an interesting, and simple, "experience point" system. Orks can earn Ork Points, or OPs, for doing "something that especially Orky." OPs are what other systems would call Hero Points. An Ork spends them to add to skills, roll or resist damage, or reroll failed skill rolls. An ork can also spend OPs to increase skills, but a limit of 1 skill increase per session discourages saving OPs instead of spending them like they are going out of style. *Ork!* also encourages the GM to hand out the points during play and not to keep too close track of them, to further encourage their rapid use. GMs can also be inconstant about rewards -- players who complain are not acting like Real Orks! Orks can also increase stats, but only by surviving a minimum number of adventurers in the incredibly harsh Ork world rather than by spending points.

Ork! includes everything you need to know about ork society, ork reproduction, ork shamans and why orks should

tread lightly around them. ***Ork!*** has a bestiary of common ork foes -- the aforementioned Squishy men, Giant Squids (who inhabit everything from small puddles on up), and so on. Ork! also has a complete starting adventure and a couple of pages of adventure seeds to get a GM's, er, Krom's, mind churning with ideas.

Does the game have down points? Yes. It has no index, although it does not seem necessary. Few rules should need to be looked up once you start playing. Another down point is the need for d20s, d12s, d10s, d8s, d6s, and d4s. Old RPGers probably have buckets of these to dig into, but they will be an added cost for groups without them. The game is also very silly, which may not be to the taste of some gamers. This is not a game for people looking to add depth to the culture of the orks in their fantasy worlds.

The price-to-pages ratio may also concern some potential buyers. $12.95 for 64 pages seems like a lot -- this feeling should disappear once you read through the book. It really is all you need to unleash your inner ork, it is packed with humor and fun. The game is well written, rules are laid out well, the artwork is appropriately gory, and both the game and rulebook are full of humor. ***Ork!*** is as close to a beer-and-pretzels RPG as I have ever encountered. I enjoyed it immensely, and look forward to further unleashing of the inner ork of my local gamers.

-- Peter V. Dell'Orto

Pyramid Pick

The Hills Rise Wild!

Published by [Pagan Publishing](#)

Designed by Jesper Myrfors and John Tynes

Artwork by Dennis Detwiller

$29.95 (expected retail price); 18 Board Tiles, 32 Cards, 24 Cardstock Miniatures, 24 Corpse Markers, Damage Hats, character sheets, and Rulebook

Pagan Publishing's contribution to "beer-and-pretzels gaming" is this year's GenCon release of *The Hills Rise Wild!*, a miniatures game of brutal redneck carnage. Two to four players control their teams of redneck Ghouls, Mutants, Deep Ones or Cultists to slay their opponents, find the mystic Necronomicon, and summon their favorite Elder God. Fun for the whole family, assuming it's the Whateley family . . .

Players can choose their teams from the Marsh Clan, the Whateley Clan, the DeGhoule Clan, and the Cult of Ezekiel. The six characters on each team have special abilities that they can use once per game, and some characters have abilities that can be used every turn! Weapons are hand to hand and distance, including guns, spells, tentacles, and psionic powers. Damage gets dealt, and impressive dice rolls take you to the Brutal Damage Table, where your characters get hurt so badly that *you* feel their pain.

Setup of the game is simple: cut apart the cardboard miniatures, including the corpses and Damage Hats. (The hats hang off the top of each character as they get hit, becoming stunned or unconscious). Each player gets dealt board tiles, and everyone takes turns laying out the board. Strategies involve putting tiles with shacks (each shack has its own mystery card) near you, while saddling your opponents with open fields where they'll be sitting ducks for your distance weapons. And, of course, if you're the lucky (or unlucky) player with the Whately Mansion, you'll want that near you. If you can find the Seal.

Yes, the Whately Mansion became mystically warded with the death of Old Wizard Whately, and you'll need the Whately Seal in order to open it to get your hands on the Necronomicon. If you've survived that far, you'll try to make it back to your home tile to perform the (potentially fatal) summoning.

After laying out the board, players start with their characters on their own home tile, and each person takes a turn moving their miniatures, then engage in any combat they choose. The shacks on the tiles get investigated, and the Mystery Cards in them give their benefits (nifty magic items) or disadvantages (being sucked into the earth and eaten). Each character sheet has spaces to hold cards that are items, making gameplay easier while you control your miniatures.

The rules are clear, simple, and easy to follow. Players would be advised to make up extra copies of the damage tables and combat modifiers, as well as character sheets . . . or you could laminate the character sheets so you could use dry-erase markers during the game. Both characters and board tiles are nicely done in full color, but the lack of hex markings on the board necessitates use of a ruler to calculate movement and weapon distances.

As the board layout changes each time you play, and the Mystery cards that get placed in the shacks are dealt differently each time (not all the cards get used in every game) and players can change teams between games, game

play and strategies can change from game to game. It'll take a while for this game to go stale on you. Well, that depends on the amount of beer and pretzels you're consuming, I guess. The rules also include suggestions for variant play and different board layouts, allowing you to change things around as you like, which is useful if this game captures your soul. (Sorry, couldn't resist.)

Players should set aside a half-hour or so for learning the rules (more if you're cutting out the pieces so you can play) and anywhere from an hour to three for gameplay, depending on experience, number of players, strategy, and luck. The carnage is impressive, with characters only rarely coming back from the dead. Pagan is already planning an expansion for the zombie lovers out there!

Getting into character regarding your team is also lots of fun, redneck accents are encouraged. Pagan Publishing has done things before that make you look at the whole Mythos subject a little oddly, but with *The Hills Rise Wild!*, H.P. Lovecraft probably spins just a little faster in his grave every time a player threatens "a whole heapin' helpin' o' hurtin'" on his opponent.

-- Seth Cohen & Karl Musser

For King And Chronology: The *Macaulay* Dossier

"Could by industrious valour climb
To ruin the great work of Time
And cast the Kingdoms old
Into another mould."
-- Andrew Marvell, *An Horation Ode Upon Cromwell's Return From Ireland*

It's time for another crack at frame-making; this campaign frame is born roughly from equal parts of John Crowley's masterful novella "Great Work of Time," the crosstime Zeppelin novel *The Whenabouts of Burr*, by Michael Kurland (and a soupcon each of Keith Laumer's *Worlds of the Imperium*, Michael Moorcock's *Warlord of the Air*, and James Blaylock's *Lord Kelvin's Machine*), and anticipation of **GURPS Steampunk**. As befits an alternate-historical frame, I've offered plenty of alternative versions of the *H.M.A.S. Thomas Babington Macaulay* and her sponsors, so even if your players read this (which they should) they won't know which alternate she springs from when her sleek form ghosts across their provincial little sky. Tally-ho, then.

"The Question put down by Mr Joynson-Hicks asks whether the War Office has any information as to a Zeppelin dirigible passing over Sheerness on this date (14 October 1912), whether the Zeppelin dirigibles can attain a speed of nearly sixty miles an hour and remain afloat for thirty hours at a stretch, and whether the British Government has any dirigibles of any practical value."
-- Question in Commons, as reported by the *London Evening News*

His Majesty's Air Ship *Thomas Babington Macaulay* is, to all outside appearance, a completely normal 709-foot Vickers Model R-100F (the "F" denoting a "Frontier" version, with double-woven spidersilk canopy, Maxim aircannon, Marconi radio-detection apparatus, and onboard Swordfish reconnaissance aeroplane). Its catalysed-hydrogen ballonets allow it to lift sixty tonnes of cargo, crew, and passengers, and its six Rolls-Royce acetocene engines drive it at a maximum speed of eighty miles per hour. (The GM may, of course, adjust these dimensions to suit her own sense of the dramatically appropriate.) Of those sixty tonnes, of course, six hold the Delawar-Kelvin Apparatus that conveys (or, rather, reconfigures the ambient aether to convey) the airship through time, and across it.

Using the Delawar-Kelvin Apparatus, as currently configured, does have one or two drawbacks. To begin with, the Apparatus is "grounded" by contact with the Earth's surface, and will not properly attune the aether for transit in a ground (or sea) installation -- thus, the need for a fleet of dirigibles. It also makes a fairly extreme hash out of any electronic equipment dependent on the transistor, the semi- or super-conductor, quantum bubbles, holographics, or, really, anything but reliable vacuum tubes. Given the amount of aetheric machinery in use throughout the Empire, those technologies must remain roads not taken (as in **GURPS Lensman**).

The observant reader will note that aetheric technology, as described here, does allow micromechanical or even gross nanotechnological devices to operate. The prescient GM will either avoid introducing said technologies to the worlds, or have them be closely guarded secrets brought back from a more advanced timeline by the Far Future Expedition of the *H.M.A.S. Edward Gibbon* in 1916. For a truly overpowering vessel, the *Macaulay* and her sister craft can actually be fully nanotechnological rather than steampunk craft, literally "reverse engineered" by bringing assemblers back to the Victorian Era. The GM may also maintain a sphinxlike silence on the provenance of such seemingly-advanced or anachronistic technologies as commercial spidersilk, the extraordinarily fuel-efficient acetocene engines (which can also be advanced fuel cell technology, for the GM who doesn't mind the dirigible never needing to obtain specialized fuel), and any other devices she cares to include in the *Macaulay's* stores locker.

"Take this Empire . . . One doesn't want to be mawkish, but one has served it. Extended it a bit, made it more secure; done one's bit. You and I. Nothing more natural, then, if we have worked for its extension in the future, to imagine its extension in the past. We can put our finger on the occasional bungle, the missed chance, the wrong man in the wrong place, and so on, and we think: if I had only been there, seen to it that the news went through, got the guns there in time, forced the issue at a certain moment -- well. But as long as one is dreaming, why stop?"
-- Sir Geoffrey Davenant, in "Great Work of Time," by John Crowley

The Royal Cliographic Society, in theory, exists to map the timestreams; to record histories, rescue scientists, and to find the eddies where chronal storms -- released by divine force (the Crucifixion), magical experimentation (the confused knot of time around John Dee), simple ectoplasmic overload (any great battlefield), atomic holocaust (the fall of Atlantis) -- split and reave the worlds. (The GM can use any, or none, or all of these to "wall off" certain types or flavors of reality or historical tampering from over-pesky players -- while still allowing NPC villains to hide out in well-mapped time shoals -- or to drive said players into them on the aetheric gales.) Its existence begins, specifically, on May 18, 1902, when the brilliant British physicist Lord Kelvin received communications that he originally assumed to come from Mars. In fact, they did -- from a British experimental station on Mars in 1953, which had stumbled upon the mechanism of transtemporal aetheric communication. Its inventor, George Delawar, urged Lord Kelvin to build a time-travel apparatus and save Britain from atomic decimation in the 1940s. (Having opened the Pandora's Box of recursive time-machine design, the GM may either slam it shut with reference to "highest policy levels" or advance Delawar-Kelvin technology as far as she wishes, into a *GURPS Atomic Horror* style "time belt," or even to psionically-activated time-projectors in a pocket dimension that obviate the need to physically have a time machine at all, which would spoil the airship motif.) After ten years of experimentation, the Delawar-Kelvin Apparatus successfully propelled a covertly-built airship, the *H.M.A.S. Thomas Carlyle*, from Sheerness in 1912 to Branau, Austria in 1889 to abduct a newborn infant.

Here the record, and history, bifurcates. In the most innocent possible reading (and gaming), the Royal Cliographic Society averts World War One and now simply acts to explore the temporal-cliographic continuum in fine *Rip Hunter -- Time Master!* style. (Although the GM may have any combination of temporal physics she likes apply in various reaches of the timescape, *GURPS Time Travel's* Limited Reverse Communication, Temporal Snarls (at best), and Plastic Time with Medium Resistance should work for the central homeline of the R.C.S. The Observer Effect does not apply there.) The crew of the *Macaulay* can spend its time researching the fate of the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel, the contents of the Library of Alexandria, or even the biology of the dinosaurs in proper Edwardian fettle.

In the "rather grey" reading, the R.C.S. meddles frequently in its home timeline and that of others to advance the causes of decency, civilization, and order -- namely, the cause of the British Empire. To avoid accidentally editing itself out of the timeline, the R.C.S. has an absolute ban on interfering with British history before the birth of Lord Kelvin in 1824. However, they have managed to separate the Confederacy from the United States, transfer the Alaska, Oregon, and California territories to British rule, achieve an overwhelmingly dominant position in the Caribbean through British Nicaragua, keep the Germanies splintered, extend the British Raj well into Persia and Kazakhstan and Thibet, rule an unbroken swath of Africa from the Cape to Cairo, and maintain economic concessions from the Argentine to Shanghai. Meanwhile, through the R.C.S.' economic influence (and the absence of WW1), British society remains the conservative, capitalist, imperial, mannered one of Lord Kelvin's day. (The somewhat conspiratorial version of this, of course, has the R.C.S. replacing the British Government for all intents and purposes -- whether this version is "darker" depends upon the GM's view of the R.C.S., and on her view of the British Government.)

A further extension -- the R.C.S. has constructed a mile-long track of magnetic-levitation railway near its headquarters at Sheerness in Kent. A Delawar-Kelvin Apparatus, floating above the rails on a bed of magnetic current, can haul a train between worlds, assuming those worlds also have magnetic-levitation tracks in the same location. In these worlds, the Society is free to alter the timestream on a larger scale (or, says the charitable GM, it seeks out worldlines already favorable to the Society's interests, and builds its rails there). A "Red Ring" of worlds dominated by Britain turns all its energies into improvement of its transdimensional Empire, and into exploration (and expansion into? or exploitation?) of others. A few examples (given Infinity, Unltd., names [the R.C.S. homeline is Britannica-2] for *GURPS Alternate Earths* compatibility -- some GMs may wish to include Cornwallis and pre-1904 Centrum from *GURPS Alternate Earths 2*) might include:

Reality Gisbourne: The fluke death of King Philip II at Bouvines in 1214 gives King John of England the field, Normandy, and eventually primacy in Western Europe as the Kingdom of France is torn apart in the next iteration of civil wars. John's Imperial German connections keep England interfering on the Continent and keep the Plantagenets concerned with their privileges. By the time the Pope divides the New World between England and Portugal, Richard III has re-established the dominant role of the King; by the time King John IV's ironclads put down the Portuguese-sponsored rebellions in Ricardia, none question the court at Winchester at home or abroad.

Reality Orkney: Diverges with the Battle of Largs in 1263, when Haakon IV defeated King Alexander of Scotland to place himself on the Scottish throne. The Zeno voyages reopen the New World to the Scottish-Norse, and New Orchadia is a going concern when King Erik VI of Norway-Scotland becomes King Eric I of England in 1603. After a series of wars with Spain over France and the New World, the Empire of the Isles settles into its hegemony with the Industrial Revolution.

Reality Plantagenet-2: After the Twenty-Three Years' War ended in 1360, the Angevin Empire in France was secure. Sicily, Aragon, and Portugal all came under the Angevin royal demesne in the next century; the explorations of Cabral and Corte-Real gave the Angevins dominion over the New World in the one after that. When the Turks took Vienna in 1541, the only remaining European powers were Poland and Sweden, whose alliance against the Angevins became a political union in the 1630s when both nations absorbed Germany (Poland having already picked up the Russian crown in 1612). Wars over the next two centuries remained inconclusive, as both powers played out the Great Game in Turkey and India, complicated from the 1830s by newly-industrialized Egypt.

Reality Britannica-4: The "Protestant Duke" of Monmouth (bastard son of Charles II) successfully becomes King in the rebellion of 1685; his policy of moderation in religion and Parliamentary relations leads to expansion of Parliamentary representation to American colonists (as a means of undercutting the Puritan influence in New England). Lord Washington becomes Duke of Washington for his brilliant conquest of Louisiana from Spain during the Sugar War of 1779-1783; Franklin and Rumford jointly create dielectric dynamos that obviate much of the squalor of the Industrial Revolution; Faraday harnesses the aether in 1839.

Finally, the R.C.S. may be floating in to save Britain from many other parallel invaders; Reichs, Bonapartes, Americans, Russians -- the enemies are as endless as time itself. From any or all of these worlds, then, the *H.M.A.S. Thomas Babington Macaulay* and its squadron-mates can launch themselves into the time-currents and into your game. Look to the skies, old chap!

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

Murphy's Rules

?

Combat!

(And A Bonus Episodic Tip)

Okay; I alluded to it a [couple of weeks](#) ago, and thanks to overwhelming letters (and by "letters" I really mean "letter from André"), I'm returning to the topic.

I'm talking, of course, about my attitude towards combat.

I used to hate combat in RPGs. Well, perhaps hate is too strong a word; lets just say I found it intensely boring compared to other aspects of gaming I liked more. And the reason I hated it was fostered by *Fighting Fantasy* books, early computer RPGs (*Bard's Tale* and *Ultima*, among others), and even many early **Advanced Dungeons & Dragons** adventures.

Why? Because there were only two possible outcomes (or so I believed at the time):

- PCs win. Game continues.
- PCs lose. Game ends.

To be sure, I wasn't entirely incorrect. In the *Fighting Fantasy* books, for example, if you didn't win a combat, that meant you died, and you have to start over. In computer RPGs, if all of your characters die, you reload the game and try again. (These devilishly difficult early computer games were also my first introduction to hex editing, curiously enough.) And at random I picked up the classic *AD&D* adventure **Tomb of Horrors** and reaffirmed those earlier memories.

For those unfamiliar with the adventure, here's a synopsis:

- The PCs die.

At least, that was my impression. In general this adventure has passages not unlike, "Ask the players what time it is. Whoever answers first receives 20d6 points of **stampeding giraffe** damage." The **Tomb of Horrors** was originally a tournament adventure, and consists of a linear dungeon where, in each room, there is an obstacle that needs to be overcome. If it isn't, the game/tournament/fun ends. My favorite "classic" adventure, **Ghost Tower of Inverness**, isn't much better, but (in my opinion) it hides its linearity a bit more.

(In all fairness, and as an aside, I should point out that many of the earlier *AD&D* adventures were *not* linear. **Expedition to the Barrier Peaks**, easily the most entertainingly mind-shaking classic adventure I've ever read, is *very* non-linear, despite it also having apparently been a tournament scenario. Of course, my ten-year-old self would have been completely overwhelmed to run it effectively. But it was a great read, and it's got a neat picture of a Mind Flayer with a Blaster Pistol.)

So when I first started GMing seriously, I followed the examples I'd seen before and internalized (along with the general trends of movies and comics). And so there would be a general story, and the players would face Bad Things, defeat them, and the story would continue.

It's what happened in the non-combat moments that held my interest as a GM, and the parts that (in my mind) had the most chance to surprise me. *How* do they react to the evil Dr. Bingo's offer of immortality? *What* do they do when they learn their teammate is a serial killer? *Will* they try to save the President, or building full of people, or . . . against all odds . . . think of a way to do both?

For the most part, I still believe combat can be fairly straightforward and uninteresting, both as a player *and* a GM. (I think it's one of the reasons as a player I create so few characters with any substantial combat abilities; I'm forced to try to come up with non-combat solutions to troubles, which pleases me.) But I had an epiphany many moons ago that

changed my attitude significantly, and opened my eyes for other combat possibilities. I'll share this next week, since that way I get *two* columns out of a pretty simple topic.

* * *

I tend to run a fair number of cinematic adventures/campaigns, including ones based on television, movie, and comic properties. One of the problems I've had in the past (which I've alluded to obliquely in a [previous column](#)) is that players always want to try to access previous adventures' NPCs, storylines, and solutions. Thus if the PCs encounter (for example) the Guardian of the Timestream, or the Mahjiqk Yewzers, or Clyde the Precognitive Alien, then the temptation always exists to run back to it/them/him if things go awry. While it makes perfect sense from a gaming standpoint, it doesn't simulate the episodic nature of some television and comic genres very well.

[opening credits]

"Captain, the counselor is succumbing to some strange disease."
"Why don't we run her through the transporter a couple times, like we did last week for the engineer?"
"Oh! That worked."

[end credits]

So as I was eating my bowl of Crispix this morning (Crispy Modifier x2), I came up with a possible solution (albeit one I haven't tried yet).

If you're trying to represent an episodic world (and your players understand this), then why not dock some or all experience points from players who pursue these other options? If experience points are supposed to represent how much the characters have learned or grown, and they haven't learned or grown in any ways since last week's episode, then they shouldn't get as many (or any) rewards.

This rule might also apply to the continuities of worlds with long pre-established "solutions" (*Star Trek*, *Star Wars*, most superhero comic series). If the players decide this adventure is too tough for them, and decide to call the Justice Squad, then they shouldn't get the rewards. (This might also explain how some of the B-list super-teams never call in reinforcements . . .)

Of course, like so many things, this option only works if the players and GM trust each other. If I were to use this method, I would probably allow players to ask if they should pursue previous threads. Thus while a routine murder mystery probably wouldn't warrant a trip to the Guardian of the Timestream, the reappearance of the Time Weasels might. (I would also probably *award* bonus experience to players who could think of good reasons why previous options *weren't* available. "Well, Captain, I *might* recommend we visit the Guardian of the Timestream, but that would entail crossing the Vague Zone . . . ")

Players and GMs would also need to make sure they understood who/what *was* permissible to access between adventures. DNPCs, Allies, and Patrons would all obviously be accessible, for example, but other fixtures of some established universes might not.

I'm not sure if this would work, but I know I'm curious to run a game set in the DC universe again to see . . .

-- *Steven Marsh*

* * *

Last week's answer: **Laws of the Night** unrevised edition, back cover (many printings)

(Five stars) "Dragon wakes if player comes within 3 squares (DRAGON WAKES SOUND). Dragon chases nearest player or player with treasure, moves 1 square per turn, diagonally & over walls. Dragon attacks if it lands on square with player (DRAGON ATTACKS SOUND)."

The Puzzle Box

(for Unknown Armies)

(Location unknown)
555-2121
Hours: Daily, 6 pm to 5 am.

by Chad Underkoffler

Summary: Tucked away deep in a maze of downtown alleyways, the Puzzle Box is a ramshackle tavern that doesn't appear on any street map, has no postal delivery address, and doesn't advertise at all. It's an out-of-the-way meeting place for those types of people who desire privacy . . . and many of those people are at least somewhat clued-into the Occult Underground.

Unfortunately, it's also the haunt of poseurs, cranks, con men, and what can only be described as "magickal groupies." Down-and-out dukes come here to score ersatz-apprentices to squeeze for cash in return for teaching a few magick tricks, hire semi-clued muscle that won't rabbit at the first sight of a clockwork, trade scuttlebutt and rumors, and pick up partners for meaningless -- or in the case of Pornomancers, meaningful -- sex.

The Puzzle Box is *not* the hangout of the cream of the Occult Underground. You won't find the big boys of the scene (Angela Forsythe, Daphnee Lee, the Freak, Dirk Allen -- okay, maybe Dirk Allen) hanging out here. It's too low-rent, too greasy, too tawdry. It's a dive bar -- why would anyone with earth-shaking magickal powers hang out in a dive bar? It does serve as an introduction to the secret clubs, nightlife, and shops that exist below the surface of the everyday world. For the clueless thug or the new-minted apprentice, the Puzzle Box is a great place to "learn the ropes" in. For the dedicated but mundane occult researcher, there are a few grains of hard fact on magick and the Occult Underground to find, if one is willing to sort through mountains of chaff. For those more experienced in the Underground, it's the absolute last ditch, long shot sort of place to hunt for clues and rumors.

Detailed Description: The Puzzle Box is three rooms, plus a basement. The basement is used as storage space for the bar supplies; there is also a small "root cellar" packed with Freaky Stuff. One corner of the basement is a grungy but well-appointed kitchenette with fridge, grill, and deep fryer for quick bar food. A dumbwaiter connects the basement with the back of the bar; it's large and powerful enough to lift a full beer keg to ground level.

The front room contains the bar and a dozen tables. An old Wurlitzer jukebox squats in the corner, loaded with odd and off-beat records: from heavy metal to Bach Requiems to spoken word to Dixie jazz to Gregorian chant. All of the recordings deal with religion, the supernatural, or magick. Hanging over the bar are a number of ring puzzles. These, along with the numerous Rubik's cube and similar puzzles, sit on shelves all around the back room. Whenever someone solves a puzzle, they get a free drink. However, if they break one of the puzzles, or substitute a pre-solved one of their own, they'll be thrown out and kept out until they make reparations to Peppy.

The back room has an ancient pinball machine that tilts whenever someone says the word "rubber" in its presence, a billiard table with

blue felt, and a real cork dartboard, sans darts. A number of comfy
vinyl couches and easy chairs line the walls of this room. A bulletin board with "For Sale" and "Wanted to Buy" sorts of notes hangs on the wall here. Some of the items being traded are a little odd -- a virgin's kiss, a dead bonsai, a monkey in a bottle, etc.

The last room is Peppy's Office, and it is tragically boring. It's the size of a broom closet, and the space is mostly taken up by a desk, office chair, filing cabinet, and a set of bookshelves. The most interesting thing in the room is the economy-size package of white pocket T-shirts, which are the only shirts Peppy wears.

GMCs Found Within or Nearby: Peppy Slade is the owner and bartender. Joachim Walker is the bouncer. The Puzzle Box goes through a weekly parade of bartenders, busboys, and grill cooks; either it's too freaky a place to be in, or something from the root cellar eats them. Peppy won't say which.

Adventure Seeds

- You find a city map in your mailbox. A back alley is circled in red, with the words "Tonight. 11 PM." scrawled next to the circle. When you visit the area marked on the map, you find the Puzzle Box. Who wants to meet you? Or was the map misdirected?
- Bulletin Board: "FOR SALE -- Six months of my life. $2,000 or best offer. 555-2309 Ask for Bob."
- A "groupie" approaches a magickal PC and starts begging him to teach him/her magick. All the while, this groupie is making goo-goo eyes at the adept PC. Is it a real groupie, or a disguised enforcer?
- Bulletin Board: "I NEED: Six chestnuts, caught in midair as they fell from the tree. Chestnuts must not have touched the ground or human flesh. Call Emma, 555-4544, 6 pm to midnight."
- One of the local Dipsomancers mixes his vodka and Scotch and goes on a mean bender. Joachim is knocked out by a flying barstool in the first few seconds. Peppy asks for your help in tossing him out.
- Bulletin Board: "Looking for a way out of your Troubles? Join the New Inquisition! Good pay, interesting work, and a fresh start. Call Mr. Caine at 800-NEW-LIFE"

Peppy Slade

Personality: Paul Williams as Ernest Hemingway.

Summary: He's balding, blond, short, squat, and very strong—he loves to arm-wrestle with Joachim, and has been known to pitch in and help clear the bar of troublemakers. He's a self-educated man, having traveled the world as a younger man in the merchant marine. He's covered with tattoos, smokes like a chimney, and loves a good story. His favorite authors are Joseph Heller, Jack London, Robert Heinlein, Hunter S. Thompson, and Zane Grey. He enjoys puzzles. He's clued-in to the Occult Underground, and is enjoying putting the pieces together. He's a rumormonger.

Obsession: Knowing the occult "buzz."

Passions

Rage: People who bust up his stuff: puzzles, tables, chairs, etc.
Fear: (Helpless) He's afraid of dying without getting a good punch or two in.
Noble: Storytellers. Peppy will do anything for a good story or storyteller.

Wound Points: 85

Stats

Body: 85 (Powerhouse) Speed: 40 (F) (Slow to start) Mind: 45 (Curious) Soul: 55 (Gruff but Likable)

Skills

Body Skills: General Athletics 25%, Scrappin' (Struggle) 55%, Break Things 35%
Speed Skills: Drive 15%, Dodge 25%, Handgun 45%
Mind Skills: General Education 15%, Notice 30%, *Occult Buzz 50%*
Soul Skills: Charm 20%, Lie 20%, Aura Sight 20%, Hunches 25%, Minor Rituals 25%

Occult Buzz: This is the "word on the street" as far as the Occult Underground goes. Who's hot, who's not, who's just got whacked and why, etc.

Minor Rituals: Peppy knows each of the Minor Rituals (those available to non-adepts). His deep understanding of all of them is represented by this single skill.

Madness Meter (H/F)

Violence	=	5H/2F
The Unnatural	=	5H/2F
Helplessness	=	2H/0F
Isolation	=	2H/0F
Self	=	2H/0F

Pick One

High Road: Affable and avuncular, Peppy always has a bit of info for his pals.
Middle Road: Peppy is strictly business: he'll provide information for information in return, or for cold hard cash.
Low Road: He's relentless in his need to be clued in. He has no problem with slipping someone a Mickey Finn, throwing him into the storeroom, and working them over with needlenose pliers to pry out what they know.

Adventure Seeds

- After sizing the PCs up for a couple weeks, talking with them to find out if they're "good people," Peppy

approaches them to help him decipher a new ritual he's discovered. It's the ritual of Lesser Correspondence (see UA, pg. 196). What happens when Mak Attax discovers someone else knows the recipe for their secret sauce?

Joachim Walker

Personality: The love-child of Mr. T and Mr. Rogers.

Summary: Joachim seems to be your average bouncer: big, strong, and intimidating. What most people don't realize is that he's possessed. Granted, the possession is by a benign demon -- Joachim's little brother Ricardo. When Joachim was a teenager, Ricky died of leukemia. Horrified by the unfairness of it all, Joachim prayed harder than he ever had before . . . and suddenly, little Ricky appeared inside him.

Terra Incognita: The Puzzle Box

Joachim has decided to live his life to the fullest, both for himself and for Ricky. He'll try anything once. Indeed, there are things that Ricky likes to do that Joachim isn't that fond of (drinking iced coffee, getting up early to watch Saturday Morning Cartoons, going dancing), but he'll do them to please his brother. Usually.

They share consciousness often, two minds in one body. Ricky has also left Joachim's body for short periods of time, usually after a spat, but sometimes to grab astral parasites to plop onto people he sees as Joachim's "enemies" . . . often without his brother's knowledge. Other than that, Ricky's a generally nice fourteen-year-old kid.

Ricky can perform minor telekinetic manipulations once per hour, and can do significant telekinetic actions once per day. In extreme circumstances, Ricky can lend strength and speed to his brother for periods of up to an hour, but this tuckers him out, leaving him quiescent for a number of hours, sometimes days. This is represented by the split stats for Body and Speed, and a flat +10% shift to any physical skill while "supercharged." Joachim always worries when Ricky "falls asleep," afraid that he will be gone for good . . .

Personality: (Gemini) I can dig that, but what about this . . . ?

Obsession: (General Athletics) Live life loudly; get out and have some fun!

Passions

Rage: People who waste the gifts God has given them.
Fear: (Helplessness) Losing his brother again.
Noble: Little children. Joachim -- the perfect big brother -- loves little kids, and if anything threatens them, he'll spare no effort to protect them.

Wound Points: 60/100

Stats

Body: 75/100 (Beefy/Superhuman)
Speed: 55/85 (F/S) (Quick/Like Lightning)
Mind: 40 (Enjoys Learning New things)
Soul: 60 (Child-like Nature)

Skills

Body Skills: *General Athletics 45%*, Handle Troublemakers (Struggle) 35%, Large and Hard to Move 40%, Get Back

Up 60%, Hits Harder 30%
Speed Skills: Drive 20%, Dodge 45%, Move Through Crowd Unimpeded 25%
Mind Skills: General Education 20%, Notice 25%, Demon Lore 15%
Soul Skills: Charm 45%, Lie 15%, Intimidate 40%

Hits Harder: This skill is only applicable when Ricky is boosting Joachim's strength to superhuman levels. If Joachim rolls an attack under his Hits Harder level, add an additional die of damage. If a match is rolled, add a further die.

Madness Meter (H/F)

Violence	= 3H/1F
The Unnatural	= 4H/2F
Helplessness	= 2H/1F
Isolation	= 2H/1F
Self	= 1H/1F

Pick One (Joachim)

High Road: A great guy who'll do anything to help out a friend.
Middle Road: He'll sometimes let people get away with stuff they shouldn't be doing in the Puzzle Box, if they pass him a couple bucks.
Low Road: Joachim will do anything for sufficient cash to let him indulge in "living life" both for himself and Ricky.

Pick One (Ricardo)

High Road: Ricky's a good kid, even if he is dead; a teenage Casper.
Middle Road: Despite lacking glands and hormones, Ricky's a teenager, and suffering the same emotional swings and angst.
Low Road: Mean kid, bad seed. Jealous of Joachim's corporeality, he'll screw with his brother's life just for the fun of it.

Possessions: Lots of sports equipment, a beat-up pickup, and a small apartment near work.

Connections: Joachim becomes great friends with everyone he meets. He also does some volunteer work as a Big Brother. His Little Brother is named Jamal and lives across town.

Adventure Seeds

- Someone has discovered Joachim is possessed and likes it, and has threatened to exorcise Ricky unless Joachim pays up. Joachim approaches the PCs for help.
- The PCs see Joachim beat one of their dipsomancer buddies senseless. The boozehound tried to Soul Sip Ricky!
- Word on the street is that Joachim, the bouncer at the local dive bar, knows a way to ditch astral parasites! And all he asks is that you contribute a C-note to the local Youth Center . . . It's gotta be a scam, right?

Pyramid Pick

Epicycles CD (related to the Fading Suns RPG)

Created by [The Changelings](#)

Available from [Middle Pillar](#)

44 min; $8.00 (+$5.00 shipping)

Fading Suns fans are lucky. While other RPGs have had to make do with *Conan* and *Matrix* soundtracks (not necessarily a bad thing), players of the *Fading Suns RPG* have *two* soundtracks (albeit both are tangential).

The first, the red book audio tracks from the *Emperor of the Fading Suns* computer game, is certainly enjoyable, and a good addition for any gamers musical library, but relies too heavily on synthesizers and computer-generated effects for my tastes: high on technical merit, low on soul. But this review isn't about that game, so I'll stop.

Epicycles features music originally created by The Changelings for the *Fading Suns*-based *[Noble Armada](#)* computer game (in addition to music created for the [Netherworld](#) haunted house in Atlanta), and, unlike the *Emperor of the Fading Suns* game, ranks high both technically *and* artistically.

The Changelings, based in Atlanta (the same city as the creators of the *Fading Suns* RPG *and* Noble Armada . . . what're the odds?!?), tout themselves as creators of "a unique blend of classical, Middle Eastern, ambient pop-fusion"; in *Epicycles*, they have lived up to these claims. From the opening drone of an insistent computerized ping that segues into haunting lyricless voices accented by violin and percussion, Epicycles immediately creates an enfolding techno-gothic atmosphere, melding churchly choirs, noble marches and mechanical instrumentation seamlessly.

The first track, "Red Shift," is a great opening track that should immediately set the mood for most *Fading Suns* campaigns. It's a good general-purpose dramatic gaming song. The second track, "Eclipse," is a lot slower and more ethereal. Although nowhere near as dramatic or exciting as the previous track, it still maintains the mood, and should be useful for quiet moments of courtly intrigue. The third track, "Tannhauser Gate," is tense, with greater Middle Eastern flair than the other tracks. Its emphasis on percussion (gongs, drums, and tambourines), violin and viola is almost distracting, but the whole track (indeed, the whole album) is complex and engaging enough that it shouldn't detract from a gaming session unless it's played too loud. It's good combat music. The final track from the *Noble Armada* game, "Dulcinea," is remarkably subtle, and again skillfully uses vocals as an instrument that accompanies the keyboard. It is more engaging than "Eclipse," and seems wonderful for epic traveling music (which many *Fading Suns* games have in abundance).

The remaining two tracks on this CD were composed for a haunted house, and the difference in audience is noticeable (though not terribly distracting). Reminiscent of "Tubular Bells," "The Young Merlins" lacks the choral arrangements of the previous tracks, relying more on a suspense-building repetition of keyboard and light percussion themes. "Dreams in the Witch House" is even quieter, and relies on wind-blown notes, odd instruments (including a musical saw!), and warped distortion to evoke a mood of *Blair Witch*-esque ominous apprehension. Snippets of voices, seeming to call out (to coerce or warn?) add to the atmosphere, making both of these tracks suitable for the truly mysterious, and perhaps frightening, anomalies of the universe.

Perhaps my biggest complaint about the CD is the somewhat incongruous disparity between the two commissioned projects; while the CD opens with the bold dramatic strokes of the *Fading Suns* universe, it ends literally with a whisper . . . appropriate for a haunted house, definitely, but an anticlimactic ending for an otherwise great album. Oh, and like all good CDs, I would love for this one to have been twice as long . . . but that's more compliment than

complaint. In all, this CD compares favorably with the *Dune* soundtrack and the calmer moments of the *Fifth Element* soundtrack. I can recommend *Epicycles* without reservation for all fans of the **Fading Suns** universe, and without much reservation for anyone in related genres (**Star Wars**, **Star Trek**, **Dune**). Since the future of the *Noble Armada* computer game seems somewhat uncertain, and it wouldn't contain two of the six tracks anyway, you may want to pick up this CD.

Two tracks from this CD ("Red Shift" and "Dulcinea") are available as streaming audio samples on-line at [MP3.com](MP3.com).

-- Steven Marsh

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Pyramid Review

Chrononauts (Beta Version)

Published by Looney Labs

Designed by Andrew Looney

32 Time Line cards, 12 ID cards, 10 Mission cards, 81 Chrononauts cards, rulebook, $12.00 (The price for the final version has not been set.)

(Review Note: This review is based on the beta version of Chrononauts, sold in a limited edition at Origins 2000. The final, full color version is expected in October 2000 and a price has not been set. Andrew Looney stated that changes from the beta to the final version would be minor and consented to a review based on this version.)

"So, you've finally gotten yourself a Time Machine. Now what?"
Perhaps you will sabotage Sputnik, perhaps you will stop the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, or perhaps you will save John Lennon. Chrononauts, a new game by the makers of Fluxx and Aquarius, provides these and many more opportunities for two to six players.

This delightful card game pits Chrononauts, or time travelers, against one another in a race to get home to their own realities, gather three specific artifacts, or patch up enough holes in time to keep the universe from collapsing. Whichever player can complete one of these goals first wins. Along the way, the Chrononauts will rewind time, reverse fate, start World War 3, then back up and do it all over again.

The key to Chrononauts is the Time Line. A four by eight grid of cards represents the years between 1865 and 1999. One year, and one major historical event, grace each card. 13 of the events are Linchpin events, meaning that players can directly alter the event by flipping the card to reveal an alternate history. For example, in 1980 players can reverse "John Lennon Murdered" to reveal "John Lennon Nearly Killed." The rest of the cards in the Time Line are Ripplepoints that are flipped when a Linchpin event changes. If John Lennon survives, then the 1986 Ripplepoint called "Challenger Explodes" flips to reveal a paradox. 1999's "Columbine High School Massacre" also flips to a paradox.

A Chrononaut's main job is fixing these paradoxes by playing Patch cards. The Patch for the 1986 paradox is "Marijuana Legalized: President Mondale signs bill ending prohibition after protest on shuttle launch pad led by John Lennon." The Patch for 1999 reads "Guns Banned: Senator Lennon's campaign to outlaw guns results in passage of Amendment xxIX, which repeals the 2nd Amendment." At first, John Lennon's death may not seem to have a clear effect on the Challenger disaster or the Columbine tragedy, but Andrew Looney put quite a bit of thought into the alternate history of Chrononauts -- and the discovery of his take on events is part of the charm of the game.

Each time a Chrononaut patches a paradox, she or he draws a card, and the first player to end a turn with ten cards in his or her hand wins the game. There are two other ways to win, however, and this opens the game to multiple strategies and the ability to abandon a failing tactic.

At the beginning of the game, each player draws an ID card and a Mission card. The ID card gives the Chrononaut a name, a short description, and three events that define that Chrononaut's reality. For example, Betty comes from a world where a-bombs were dropped on Japan in 1945, but where the Vietnam Peace Accord was signed in 1968 and

Cosmonauts beat the U.S. to the Moon in 1969. If the Time Line matches this reality at the end of Betty's turn, she wins.

Finally, each Chrononaut can complete a collection of Artifact cards as described on his or her Mission card. Betty may have drawn the Mission called "Cheaters Sometimes Win" which requires that she collect a future sports almanac, a Mona Lisa forgery, and Shakespeare's Last Play ("Mona and the Dragon.") Anyone who possesses the three Artifact cards listed on her Mission card at the end of her turn wins.

The rest of the Chrononauts deck is made up of Action cards that flip Linchpins, steal and destroy artifacts, and force players to discard cards or trade hands. Some of the cards can quickly and radically affect the game, which seems to be a trademark of Looney Labs card games.

Chrononauts is a fun and intriguing game that bears repeated playing. Its only drawbacks are the complexity of the Time Line and the chaos of its Action cards. Mastering the Time Line, which events affect which and when to turn Ripplepoints, requires some time and practice. New players will find it a challenge to determine which Linchpins are important to their ID cards. At the same time, it is the complexity of the Time Line that makes the game so interesting. The Action cards can have a dramatic, and somewhat random, effect on the game. Rotten luck may snatch victory from one player who spent 20 minutes plotting her way home only to drop it into the lap of an unsuspecting Chrononaut. If not taken too seriously, Chrononauts is a fun game and a brush-up history lesson.

-- Brad Weier

by Alex Yeager

Art by Kyle Miller and Phil Foglio

(Author's Note: We apologize for the delay in this product, after having been promised three years ago (New Product Releases: April 1, 1997). The computer that has the current draft has decided that it is entirely too silly and refuses to allow access to the original document. We have managed to obtain this scenario from the current draft (after bribing the computer with back issues of Wired and pictures of a G4 server with its cover off). We hope you enjoy it.)

Introduction

"Good morning Celestials!" Nybbas' voice cut through the homeroom like a burr saw through sandstone over the loudspeaker. "Welcome to another day of fun fun FUN here at Higher Heavens High!"

The irritating voice continued, "First, congratulations to Marc for having the highest sales during the school manna sale -- way to suck up, Marc! The co-ed touch football game is today, and everybody is encouraged to donate blood at some point during the day at the school nurse's office . . . "

* * *

"In Anime" is adapted from characters and settings found in In Nomine (IN), and uses the Toon mechanics. The intent is to have some fun with -- and even play as characters -- the major figures in the IN universe, while encouraging the slapstick of cartoon roleplaying. Those familiar with In Nomine will probably enjoy the characterizations of Archangels and Demon Princes more than someone with no previous knowledge, but Higher Heavens High School (HHHS) could be easily adapted for Teenagers From Outer Space, Big Eyes Small Mouth, or even a charter school under the auspices of (GURPS) Illuminati University . . .

You'll find that the pace of this scenario begins more slowly than a typical Toon game. This is intentional -- the personalities here are less iconic than your standard Toon character, and this will give your players a chance to get comfortable with their characters. However, you'll be thankful for the simplicity of the Toon mechanics later in the game when the PCs are being swarmed by drunken teenage Vikings. But we digress . . .

Cast of Characters

The Animator can include as many characters as they can handle, but remember that Toon moves at a maniacal pace compared to many RPGs. Players can build characters at the suggested 14 Attribute-point level to represent the "average" Celestial student, or they can even take the role of an Archangel or Demon Prince(ss)! (Laurence, who is used during this scenario as an NPC, is built with 18 Attribute points, as are all IN Superior characters.) Note that even Superiors can Fall Down in In Anime -- and a PC can cause it! Toon emphasizes fun, not realism; if it's funny, allow it

and don't worry about the implications for the In Nomine world!

Laurence is IN's Archangel of the Sword and the leader of Heaven's armies; In Anime transforms him into the quarterback of the Higher Heavens Halos football team. Other NPCs include:

- Novalis, In Nomine's Archangel of Flowers, who is transformed into a hippie chick who is slow to violence, but protective of nature,
- Kobal, the Demon Prince of Dark Humor, who is Higher Heaven High School's resident prankster,
- Dominic, the Archangel of Judgment, who will play a role in the final scene of the scenario,
- Any other Angels and Infernals you choose. Marc could run the ticket booth and food concessions, Belial fires off the cannon every time the HHHS football team scores -- let your mind roam . . .

In addition, a brush-up on your Norse mythology might prove helpful. Three specific notables that appear in this scenario:

- The Valkyries, the female warriors who escort fallen warriors to Valhalla, become the Valhalla Valkyries touch football team,
- Loki, the trickster god of the Norse pantheon, who becomes Valhalla High's master of practical jokes,
- Mimir, wisest of the Aesir, who advises Odin despite having his head cut off by the Vanir. He comes into play during the final scene, still wise, knowledgeable and missing a body.

Note that a useful online resource for mythological reference is the Encyclopedia Mythica, at http://www.pantheon.org/mythica/.

Norse by Norse-est

The HHHS Dean of Extracurricular Activities has informed Laurence that Valhalla High wants to arrange a touch football game between the two schools in one week. Valhalla High has a girls' touch football team (the Valhalla Valkyries) that has played together for some time; they have offered to let the Higher Heavens students field a co-ed team for the game to make up for it. The PCs are part of the team that Laurence has put together for the game.

In Anime: The Big Game

Most of the time at HHHS, the Angelic students ("the good kids", "teachers' pets", "those with a Bright future") are at odds with the Infernal students ("the bad kids", "the troublemakers", "those with a permanent record"). However, there's still enough school spirit that both sides can unite for short periods against another school. Consequently, even some of the Infernal Superiors can join the Archangel characters on the touch football team -- just emphasize that there's no love lost between the two factions.

Laurence will schedule a meeting with the PCs (and any other NPCs you want to pepper the team with) to get organized for the game. Laurence, in addition to being the school quarterback, is devastatingly handsome, very focused on succeeding honorably at any task put in front of him and is generally a bit of a stick-in-the-mud. (His standard reply to being asked out on a date is infamous: "How will this date benefit the school?" The date usually goes downhill from there.)

Laurence will open the meeting with his rules for the upcoming game:

- No male is to hit a girl.
- No one is to commit any kind of foul or rule infraction.

- The team is to be absolutely sportsmanlike and polite to all opposing players.
- No spitting.
- No harsh language.
- If their uniforms get dirty, you will go change it. You are a symbol of Higher Heavens High School while on the field, and you will represent them in clean clothing at all times.
- No hitting each other on the behind -- it is unseemly.

Feel free to add more -- *many* more -- items to the list. The PCs should realize that they not only won't be able to get away with anything, but that the entire proceeding will be no fun whatsoever. The other impression they will be left with is that Laurence does *not* expect to lose, and he will *not* be pleased if the Halos even come *close* to losing. (Laurence is honorable to the point of stuffy, and *very* focused on the goal of winning.)

Novalis, on the other hand, is only here to help the other players have fun. Higher Heaven's resident hippie chick, she's all flowing dresses and floral garlands. She is, at least, until Belial sets fire to the school flower bed or something similar, at which she instantly transforms into the Raging Fury of Nature (tm). Violence disturbs her, but she chose to participate in the game because she wants to understand the fun of sports, and "football with touching" sounds -- well, fun.

Laurence will then show a videotape (compliments of Nybbas) that documents a Valkyrie practice. Nybbas' running commentary should detail scenes of such extreme violence and prowess that the PCs should be quaking in their shoes by the end. Laurence will stop the tape, reiterate that they the team has a lot to do in the next two days (!), and then hands out playbooks. (PCs should make a Lift Heavy Object roll to avoid dropping the book when passed to them.)

The first practice should be a disaster. Laurence will work them to the bone, running complicated plays (make up horrendously long play names, and don't tell them what they mean ahead of time) and chewing them out if they don't execute them successfully. Novalis will use her Dodge ability to simply avoid any player coming towards her, and will hand the ball to any player requesting it (on either team).

And, up in the stands, Kobal will heckle the players and occasionally use Cosmic Shift to turn the field to ice, or the ball into an anvil, or whatever other nastiness you can create. Kobol is HHHS's resident prankster, with a bit of a vicious streak and no school loyalty whatsoever. Unbeknownst to the players -- at least at the moment -- Kobal has bet Loki (Valhalla High's equivalent of Kobol) that he can make HHHS LOSE the game. Loki will be working as actively to make the Valkyries lose.

Left Guards, Right Guards -- All We Need Are Asgards

(Play the team meeting and the practice short and sweet, to get you to this scene as fast as possible. This scene should play out very much like a typical ***Toon*** scenario.)

The first play of the game was over -- and first and ten for the Higher Heavens Halos had become second and twenty-two. Laurence walked over to the huddle, a bit wobbly. "Work with me for a moment. They have agreed to play touch football with us, right?" A few pained nods followed. "So, even though we should not hit a girl, we CAN touch them in a respectful and defensive way."

"Respectful? . . . " asked one player, incredulously.

"Yes." Laurence nodded. "Be especially respectful of their offensive line, please, as the alternative seems to be me getting touched in a most painful and discomforting way . . . "

* * *

The stands are full, and the game is ready to go. Unfortunately, so are
the referees -- Dominic (from HHHS) and Mimir (from Valhalla
High). Dominic just likes rules: he's the quartermaster for the HHHS

student council, hall monitor, head of the school Mock Inquisition team and isn't happy unless he's enforcing rules -- *any* rules. He's the one that will call anything possible -- football infractions, local statutes, traffic laws ("Failure to yield right-of-way -- fifteen yards!"), anything he (and the Animator) can think of.

The other referee, Mimir of the Aesir, is much more reasonable -- but, unfortunately, he's also a severed head, and will spend much of the game only looking where Dominic (or anyone else) points his head to look. He also gets set down often, and, oddly enough, is roughly the same size as the football. He's more interested in letting the teams play the game, but will become increasingly frustrated after being set on his face, left floating in the holy water cooler, being kicked through the uprights for three points, etc.

Here is where the PCs can cut loose. Laurence will still insist on honorable play, but is susceptible to Fast-Talk as to why it was appropriate for the PC to create a high-powered fan during the last play to blow the Valkyrie pass out of the stadium for an incompletion. Laurence will be conflicted, but his need to win shouldn't be overlooked in his desire for honorable play.

The Valkyries are incredibly physical and hard to hurt, but they are not the brightest beings in the firmament -- so Smarts and Chutzpah skills should be particularly effective. Their playbook seems to consist of one play (ram opponents into ground, ask if they want to go to Valhalla with them). The HHHS players will also need to avoid their horned helmets and their pigtails containing bricks, anvils and other dangerous objects. (PCs should learn to dread the Valkyrie Spinning Pigtails of Death attack.)

The visitors' side of the field will be filled with drunken Vikings. (Yes, this is high school, but the Viking drinking age is low enough.) Throughout the game, they will yell various insults, unflattering comparisons and random speculation as to the lineage of Halo players. If the Valkyries lose, they will immediately rush the field, looking for a fight.

Kobal and Loki will be running around the stands and field, causing whatever havoc they can against their respective teams. Novalis will continue to sidestep and otherwise non-violently participate in the game. Have a few running gags ready -- Lilith (In Nomine's "I'll help you now, and you'll help me later" Princess) could be on the sidelines in her little cheerleading outfit -- but anytime a PC starts a sentence with "I wish that . . . " or "We need . . . ", Lilith should appear with the requested thing and a dangerous smile on her face. Feel free to transform any of the Norse or In Nomine superiors to their teen archetypes, spice to taste and stir.

Possible Endings

- The game comes down to a last-second field goal. The kick goes up, and suddenly the goal posts take off running, followed in hot pursuit by the football (Loki and Kobal again). It's up to the PCs to get the ball through the uprights.
- Several of the Valkyries sit on one of the Halos players and make that person eat a handful of turf pulled up from the field. Novalis's eyes narrow, she whispers, "For the grass!", and lines up with a very determined look on her face. (Use her Fight skill and her Grow shtick to full effect.)
- The Valkyries win, but at the last moment, Dominic walks over to one of the players and pulls off a mask -- it's Athena, the star touch football player from Olympus High! Dominic declares a forfeit in favor of the Halos, and the obligatory riot ensues.

Our Players

(Only Skills that are higher than the applicable Attribute defaults are listed.)

Laurence

Species: Angel
Natural Enemies: Infernals, Opponents from Other Pantheons
Beliefs & Goals: Act Honorably
Muscle: 5
    Fight: 8
    Throw: 7
Zip: 4
    Dodge: 8
    Fire Gun: 7
    Run: 6
Smarts: 5
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 7
    Identify Dangerous Thing: 8
    Resist Fast-Talk: 6
    See/Hear/Smell: 6
    Set/Disarm Trap: 8
    Track/Cover Tracks: 8
Chutzpah: 4
    Fast-Talk: 6

Novalis

Species: Angel
Natural Enemies: Infernals, Opponents from Other Pantheons
Beliefs & Goals: Act Peaceably (Unless Nature or the Peace is Threatened)
Muscle: 3
    Fight: 7
Zip: 4
    Dodge: 7
    Jump: 5
    Ride: 5
    Run: 5
    Swim: 5
Smarts: 5
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 7
    Identify Dangerous Thing: 8
    Resist Fast-Talk: 6
    See/Hear/Smell: 6
    Set/Disarm Trap: 8
    Track/Cover Tracks: 8
Chutzpah: 4
    Fast-Talk: 6
Shtick: Grow (Cause any plant to increase in size by up to 2d6 times; permanent effect): 8

Kobal
(use comparable stats for Loki)

Species: Infernal

Natural Enemies: Angels, Opponents from Other Pantheons
Beliefs & Goals: Make Others Look Foolish, Especially in Front of Others
Muscle: 3
Zip: 4
    Dodge: 8
Smarts: 5
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 7
    Set/Disarm Trap: 9
Chutzpah: 6
    Sleight of Hand: 9
    Sneak: 9
Shtick: Cosmic Shift: 8

Dominic
(use comparable stats for Mimir)

Species: Angel
Natural Enemies: Infernals, Opponents from Other Pantheons
Beliefs & Goals: Obey Rules, Make Others Obey the Rules
Muscle: 3
    Fight: 7
Zip: 3
    Dodge: 9
Smarts: 6
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 9
    Identify Dangerous Thing: 9
    Read: 9
    Resist Fast-Talk: 9
    See/Hear/Smell: 9
    Set/Disarm Trap: 8
    Track/Cover Tracks: 9
Chutzpah: 6
    Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 9
    Sleight of Hand: 7
    Sneak: 7

Valkyries

Species: Norse
Natural Enemies: Cowards, Opponents from Other Pantheons
Beliefs & Goals: Fight!
Muscle: 5
    Fight: 9
    Throw: 9
Zip: 5
    Dodge: 7
    Fire Gun: 6
    Jump: 7
    Run: 7
    Swim: 7
Smarts: 2
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 4
    Identify Dangerous Thing: 6

   See/Hear/Smell: 6
   Track/Cover Tracks: 5
Chutzpah: 2

Innocents Abroad

by James Maliszewski

Art by Dan Smith

At the heart of any occult roleplaying game are secrets. Much of the fun players derive from participating in an occult conspiracy game arises from uncovering secrets and piecing them together so as to uncover even bigger secrets. The less the players -- and their characters -- know about the true nature of the world they inhabit, the more enjoyment they will have in the game.

Consequently, many Game Masters and players will be dissatisfied with the approach taken by games like *Conspiracy X*, *Dark*Matter*, or *Chill*, in which the player characters belong to a knowledgeable and competent organization dedicated to investigating the occult. After all, such organizations already know a great deal about the secret history of the world. In such a campaign, the heroes may not begin with all the answers, but they will have many more of them than would an average person for whom magic or extraterrestrials are sheer fantasy. Similarly, heroes employed by organizations like S.A.V.E. or the Hoffmann Institute have the benefit of significant financial backing for their operations. This provides equipment and intelligence unavailable to more "ordinary" characters.

Thus, the GM may wish to try a different model for his campaign. One such model involves "accidental groups." The members of accidental groups band together not by choice but through circumstances. For the most part, they are ordinary people -- men and women with jobs and lives that do not revolve around investigating the occult. Instead, they stumble upon something Man Was Not Meant To Know and find their lives forever changed. Such groups are common to many of the books, movies, and television shows that inspired the occult roleplaying genre and can be a rewarding campaign option.

Sadly, most games provide only the simplest overview for a GM hoping to start and maintain such a campaign. Given the vast differences between an organization-based campaign and one involving an accidental group, this is unfortunate. This article is intended to fill that void, offering concrete advice and suggestions on a number of areas vital to the success of an accidental group campaign. These suggestions are purposefully generic in their terms, enabling a GM to use them in games as diverse as *Call of Cthulhu*, *Chill*, *Dark*Matter*, *Unknown Armies*, *GURPS Illuminati* or *Horror*, and many others.

Terminal or Open-Ended?

The first thing a Game Master contemplating an accidental group campaign should decide is its basic form. Will it be a terminal game with a distinct beginning, middle, and end or will it be an open-ended game that moves from one story to the next? The answer to this question has consequences for all subsequent decisions the GM makes.

The nature of the accidental group makes terminal games easier to construct. Accidental heroes rarely have the skills and resources necessary to continue their fight against the paranormal indefinitely. Moreover, their involvement stems from a chance moment when the occult world impinged upon their everyday lives. Once the event that drew them into the world of the occult has been resolved, there is often no need -- or desire -- to persist in their quest.

Suppose, for example, the GM builds a campaign around the recovery
of a missing child. One of the heroes is divorced from the child's mother with whom he has joint custody. One day, both the mother and the child mysteriously disappear, leaving the distraught father in need of answers. Such a campaign should logically (and dramatically) continue until the father has learned the true fate of his child and ex-wife: why they disappeared and who (or what) is responsible.

It would be a mistake to assume that terminal campaigns need be short-lived ones. They certainly can be, but they need not be. In the example above, months or even years may pass before the father learns the fate of his daughter. Along the way, he may uncover many other secrets that tie into his primary investigation, yet do not resolve it. In this way, the GM can extend a terminal campaign for a long time without exhausting its potential.

Furthermore, the original goal that started the heroes down their path does not always correspond to the terminal goal of the campaign. In the example above, the child's disappearance propels the father into the secret world of the occult and sustains him there. Yet, in the course of seeking his child, the father may come to see a bigger picture, one that encompasses more than his own personal quest. In such a campaign, the father may then acquire a different goal -- a terminal goal -- that keeps the action going.

At the same time, the GM should never lose sight of the accidental event that began the campaign in the first place. Thus, the search for the missing child should never be far from the surface, even if it ceases to be the main focus of the campaign. Contrariwise, the GM should know when to call it quits and end a terminal campaign. There are few things more grating on players' nerves than reenacting the myth of Sisyphus in their campaign. Eventually, the heroes must achieve their goal -- or die trying. Perpetually frustrating all their efforts is a sure way to kill player interest and trust in the GM. Victory cannot be a mere abstraction; it must be attainable.

Open-ended campaigns, on the other hand, are much more difficult to create for accidental groups. As noted above, accidental heroes rarely have the means to become full-time investigators of the unknown. They generally have mundane concerns like jobs and families that preclude jetting off to Cairo at the drop of a Man in Black's hat. For that matter, they may lack the funds to do so. How then can a GM create an open-ended campaign for accidental heroes?

The truth is the GM can't really -- not without restructuring the campaign. Heroes drawn into an occult conspiracy by accident may not be able to return to their normal lives. In such a case, they could become full-time investigators, but they will require backing by a powerful benefactor like Aegis or S.A.V.E. Of course, their benefactor could remain anonymous, thereby giving them the means to continue their fight while maintaining the mystery essential to the success of the occult genre.

In any event, accidental groups cannot remain so in open-ended games. Over time, former innocents cannot help but be changed by their experiences, both good and bad. If the Game Master and players are willing to accept this fact and work with it, they will find it a rich source of new material for their games. Few things can be as compelling as watching the metamorphosis of a night manager of a video store into a well-honed warrior in the fight against the unknown.

Accidental Heroes

The night manager of a video store? Sure! One of the pleasures of an accidental group is the forging of ordinary people into heroes. Doing so requires a little bit of forethought, but the end result can be quite rewarding.

Admittedly, many players have difficulty creating characters that are not ersatz adventurers. On first glance, a transit cop might seem ordinary enough. After all, he is not a "real" cop, right? A transit cop could well be a great accidental hero. Yet the temptation to play him as a combat machine like any other -- complete with impressive combat skills and weaponry -- is a great one. Most transit cops do know how to handle firearms (at least in the United States), but their everyday duties rarely call for such skills. Instead, they spend much of their time dealing with drunken vagrants, photographing evidence of vandalism, and keeping an eye on rowdy teenagers.

As mundane as these duties may seem, they provide plenty of great story hooks. This is important. Just because accidental heroes are ordinary people doesn't mean they are boring people. Our transit cop probably spends a lot of time riding the bus and patrolling subway stations. Both of these activities are ripe with opportunities for the occult world to reveal its influence. Suppose he witnesses a suicide at a crowded subway station. A woman jumps in front of an oncoming train and no one tries to stop her. As he deals with the aftermath, police and emergency teams arrive, pushing him to the sidelines. When investigates the matter further, he is rebuffed and told not to interfere. Why? Thus is born a campaign.

Plot hooks are what separate any good character concept from a bad one. Hooks are absolutely vital to accidental heroes. Without background elements to draw upon, the GM must rely on feeble contrivances to involve ordinary people in an occult setting. If the night manager at the video store is a divorced father looking to reconnect with his child, the Game Master has something to work with. If the transit cop is an ex-soldier subject to post-traumatic stress disorder, his witnessing of a suicide that no one else noticed is thrown into doubt. These elements are part of what enables ordinary people to become accidental heroes.

Yet, the GM should restrict background elements that mitigate the "ordinariness" of the character too greatly. Otherwise, the character is little different from those in a standard *Conspiracy X* or *Chill* game. For this reason, accidental heroes should not begin the game with any explicitly supernatural abilities. The same holds for unusual skills and talents. Game Masters should also keep a close watch on the advantages and disadvantages of accidental heroes. Many of them are inappropriate for mundane human beings without any knowledge or experience of the occult.

Of course, occult campaigns -- even those involving accidental groups -- are all about secrets. Sometimes it can be quite appropriate for ordinary people to have "secret abilities," whether they be skills, advantages, or disadvantages. These secret abilities are known only to the GM and tie into the campaign background he has designed. For example, an electrical power worker (a fairly ordinary character) might be a UFO abductee, although he does not realize this. The accidental event that triggers his entry into the mysteries of the campaign might be an experience of missing time or waking up in an unfamiliar locale. In any case, the power worker does not begin the game knowing he is an abductee; only the GM knows that. As such, the character has a secret disadvantage with serious consequences.

The opposite situation is also possible. An occult bookstore owner might actually possess the ability to use Hermetic magic. This is a secret ability usable only after he comes to realize the power that lies within him. Once again, the GM knows of this secret ability, but does not reveal it to the player until the appropriate moment in the campaign.

Like all other abilities, secret abilities either cost or net character points. Because the players don't know their characters have them, what is to be done with those extra or lost points? There are several ways a Game Master could handle this. The simplest is pay no heed to the cost of secret abilities. This approach is more story-oriented and less driven by game balance considerations. However, some players may feel cheated if another player's character is granted expensive skills without paying the cost. In such a case, the GM could offset them by selecting an equal amount of secret flaws. Thus, a powerful enemy might hunt a latent telepath seeking to harness his potential for evil ends. Other similar solutions are possible.

Secret flaws without corresponding secret skills or advantages present a minor difficulty. After all, flaws provide extra character points in many games. How then does the player get to use these points unless the Game Master reveals that he has them? Moreover, if the GM does reveal this, doesn't it lessen some of the mystery? In some cases, this will not matter. The GM can simply give the player extra skills points with which to construct his character. In others, he can dispense the points once a previously secret flaw has been revealed through the course of the campaign. A third option allows the GM to assign the extra points to another copy of the character sheet to which only he has access. Thus, a character may actually have a higher skill level than his player realizes. This solution works especially well when the GM regularly makes rolls for the player characters in order to heighten tension. The final decision depends greatly on the sort of campaign the GM has constructed.

Anatomy of an Accident

Accidental groups arise by chance, but that doesn't mean the Game Master can do the same with his campaign. The accidental event or events that kicks it off must be carefully planned, taking into account both the characters involved and the structure of the campaign in question. Like everything else, the GM must give serious thought to the origin of his accidental heroes.

The ideal origin must include several elements if it is to accomplish its intended goals. Most importantly, it must allow for the introduction of all of the campaign's heroes. If it does not, the GM may need more than one trigger event. That is a perfectly reasonable option, especially in a campaign with more than a couple characters. In such a case, the GM must nevertheless find a way for each of the trigger events to relate to the others. Without this, the campaign will lack coherence, becoming a collection of unrelated scenarios involving unrelated characters.

Let's continue with some of previously mentioned examples. The suicide of a woman at a subway station provides a point of commonality between the video store manager and the transit cop. The one witnessed the event. The other is the ex-husband of the deceased. The connection between these two characters is simple enough. Additional characters could have been members of the crowd that also witnessed the suicide, but the GM rules against it because he wants to highlight the transit cop's experience of being the only person to see the entire event.

There are still a couple more characters in this hypothetical campaign: the power worker and the occult bookstore owner. The power worker's job often takes him into sewers while on duty. Perhaps he's working on some underground power lines beneath the occult bookstore. While there, he encounters something undeniably strange: the still-living body of an old man sealed up in a wall that shouldn't be there. Naturally, he contacts the residents of the buildings above the wall, including the bookstore owner, thereby connecting these two characters.

The question for the GM now is to connect both groups through some additional commonality. Perhaps the suicidal woman was recently a regular customer of the occult bookstore, purchasing several volumes on reincarnation and metempsychosis. Eventually, her ex-husband and the transit cop uncover this information, leading them to the bookstore, its owner, and the befuddled power worker. The GM has now successfully found several links between the characters, creating the bonds that will hold together his accidental group.

Of course, these bonds cannot simply be arbitrary ones. They must tie into the plotline of the campaign. Otherwise, the accidental group will not gel. They will drift apart as soon as the contrived nature of their bond is revealed. What the GM -- and the campaign -- needs are trigger events that bind the characters together and propel them toward the secrets of the setting. After all, accidental heroes are ordinary people. They need good reason to stick together in the face of dark forces and their minions. Anything less is a recipe for the campaign's quick disintegration.

Accidental Locales

The locations in which a campaign's scenarios take place are as important as the characters that inhabit them. We've already seen that ordinary people can throw the secret occult world into sharp relief. The same can be true of ordinary locales.

In the case of locales, "ordinary" can mean several things. At its most basic, ordinary simply refers to the commonplace and everyday. Places like a subway station, an office pool, a busy city street, or an elementary school are good examples of ordinary locales. Under most circumstances, few of us would find anything menacing about sitting in a cubicle in an office or visiting a child's classroom. However, if the characters have learned that a shape-shifting alien has infiltrated the office or that one of the schoolchildren is possessed, these ordinary locales take on entirely new casts.

The juxtaposition of the ordinary and the supernatural can be a powerful tool in the Game Master's hands. Occult games should necessarily deal with the strange and the hidden, things of which few have any real experience. Consequently, it can be easy for the bizarre denizens of the setting to become abstractions devoid of any narrative power. Without a context, there's nothing inherently terrifying about a homunculus. Place that little creature into a department store's toy department after closing time and you have the makings of a memorable -- and potentially frightening -- encounter. Always look for ways to integrate the extraordinary into the ordinary world in which the accidental heroes live. It can be a source of great drama.

Another option is to set the campaign in the players' hometown. In this way, everyone is intimately familiar with its locales, adding another layer of storytelling potential. When the GM describes a nearby site, the players can visualize it much better. More importantly, they will have a visceral sense of the incongruity that arises when dark forces exert their baleful influence on their own world. In many ways, a campaign involving accidental heroes is a campaign about heroes who could be someone we know, perhaps even ourselves. Setting the game in familiar surroundings hits this message home in a way that more exotic locales cannot.

A Different Kind of Campaign

In short, accidental hero campaigns offer a unique perspective on the occult worlds of many popular roleplaying games. While they require planning and forethought, they are no more difficult to create than more traditional games. Unlike campaigns centering on a powerful patron organization, however, accidental campaigns give ordinary people a chance to shine, something rare in most roleplaying games. There are many other rewards as well, making them well worth the risks inherent in undertaking them.

A Brief Spell of Madness: A New Twist on GURPS Magic

by Christopher M. Dicely

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Keith Johnson

Overview

This article lays out a variant system of *GURPS* magic in which the practice of magic poses great risk to the sorcerer. In can be used in a number of settings: for instance, it could be used in a "secret magic" setting, especially one in which magic was typically a dark force (like *GURPS Horror* or *GURPS Cthulhupunk*). It could also be used in a medieval fantasy setting, where it would explain why wizards might be widely feared by common folk and reluctant to share the secrets with any but apprentices carefully chosen both for natural talent and strength of will.

Basic Rules

No special advantage (i.e., Magery) is required to cast spells in this system. The curious student who finds a book with real spells buried in the stacks at her college library might learn to cast some of those spells, but only at great personal risk.

All characters have a level of Magic Stress, which represents the strain on their mind from recent magical activity. Magic Stress starts at zero, increases with spellcasting, and decreases with rest, as explained in these rules.

All characters also have a level of Stress Tolerance, which rates their resistance to the psychological effects of increasing Magical Stress. The base value of Stress Tolerance is two, but this can be modified by the Magic Sensitivity and Magic Resistance advantages.

Advantages

The Magical Aptitude advantage no longer exists. However, two new advantages for spellcasting replace it: Magic Sensitivity and Magic Power. In addition, the Magic Resistance advantage is significantly different than the standard version.

Magic Sensitivity (5 points per level)
Your mind is unusually sensitive to the underlying structure of the universe. This allows you to be more adept than most when using magic, however, it also makes you more sensitive to the shock of spellcasting. Each level of Magic Sensitivity gives you a +1 to all spell skills, but halves your Stress Tolerance. Magic Sensitivity cannot be combined with Magic Resistance or with Magic Power.

Magic Power (5 points per level)
You have a mind that is "wired better" for coping with the exposure to
mystical underpinnings of reality. This gives you the ability to wield a
greater amount of magical power at any given level of personal risk. Each level of Magic Power gives you a +1 to
Stress Tolerance, and a +1 to IQ when determining whether a spell is powerful enough to require a special modifier to
the Fright Check when casting. Magic Power cannot be combined with Magic Sensitivity, but it may be combined with
Magic Resistance.

Magic Resistance (5 points per level)
You are unusually resistant to all of the effects of magic. For each level of this advantage, any spells which have you
as the target give the caster a -1 penalty to skill, any resistance rolls you make against spells have a +1, and you
receive a +1 bonus to your Stress Tolerance. On the downside, however, you are rather inept at manipulating magic,
giving you a -3 penalty to all spellcasting rolls for each level of this disadvantage. Note that this penalty applies only
to spellcasting rolls, not to spell skill levels for other purposes (e.g., prerequisites for other spells). Magic Resistance
cannot be combined with Magic Sensitivity; it can be combined with Magic Power.

Casting Spells

When you attempt to cast a spell, you make the usual roll to cast the spell, with a penalty of -1 per point that the
casting cost exceeds your (Will + Magic Power), and the effects of the spell are resolved normally. Then, the casting
cost of the spell being cast is added to your Magic Stress. Finally, you make a Fright Check, with a penalty equal to
your Magic Stress divided by your Stress Tolerance, rounded down, and, if the spellcasting roll failed, a additional
penalty of one for each point by which it did so.

Maintaining Spells

Whenever you need to pay the maintenance cost for a spell, you follow the same procedure as with spellcasting, except
that there is no roll to cast the spell.

Recovering Energy

For each full night of sleep, a character reduces his Magic Stress by a number of points equal to IQ modified by
Strong/Weak Will and then halved, +1 per level of Magic Power. This number is known as his Recovery Number.

Powerstones

Energy from a powerstone aids in spellcasting. Energy drawn from a powerstone is not assessed against your Magic
Stress, although you still must make a Fright Check based on your current Magic Stress even if all of the energy for
your spell comes from the stone.

Ceremonial Casting and Group Magic

These special types of spellcasting use the rules in the *Basic Set* or *Magic*, with the exceptions noted here.

The only restriction on what casters may join a circle and contribute energy is that every member of the circle must know the spell. There is no minimum skill level, nor is there any limit on the amount of energy each caster may contribute. The caster with the lowest skill always makes the skill roll, and every caster gains Magic Stress and makes a Fright Check based on the amount of energy they contribute. In the event of a spell failure, the margin of failure penalizes every caster's Fright Check, not just the one who makes the roll.

Spectators are allowed (and those who know the spell may opt to be spectators rather than members of the circle). Spectators are treated exactly as members of the circle, except that their skill levels are not included when determining which caster has the lowest skill and they may each contribute only a single point of energy to the casting. The only limit to the number of spectators participating is that the amount of energy from spectators cannot exceed the skill of the least-skilled caster in the circle times the number of casters in the circle.

Each person present (within sight or 10 yards of any member of the circle or participating spectator) during the casting who is neither a member of the circle nor a participating spectator imposes a -1 penalty to the final skill roll. Each person present who is actively opposed to the spell being cast imposes the same penalty and additionally adds 5 points to the casting cost of the spell.

Enchantment

As in the standard *GURPS Magic* system, a caster's effective skill when casting an enchantment is equal to the lower of his skill with the Enchant spell or the spell being enchanted into the item.

Instead of being equal to the skill of the caster, the Power of a magic item has a base value of 10. This is increased by one point for each point by which the skill roll to create the item is made. The effects of a failed skill roll vary by the type of enchantment being used.

The enchantment methods in this system share the names of those in the standard system, but have been significantly altered.

Quick and Dirty Enchantment

This method of enchantment is treated as any other use of ceremonial magic, described above. The casting time in hours is equal to the energy cost of the enchantment divided by 100, rounded up. If the skill roll to cast a Quick and Dirty enchantment fails by less than five points, the item is still enchanted, but has a reduced Power. From the base Power of 10, subtract the number of points by which the roll failed. If the roll fails by more than five points, the enchantment fails entirely.

Any item produced by Quick and Dirty Enchantment may have flaws. To determine if it does, once the item is created, the GM should make a roll against the item's Power. If this roll succeeds, the item has no flaws. If it fails, it should have 1d/2 "warps" -- minor flaws which affect when or how it can be used. The descriptions of minor Powerstone flaws in *GURPS Magic* are a good starting point, although you will want to make sure the flaw makes sense for the item. If it critically fails, it will have 1d-1 warps plus one serious flaw - it either functions as a different spell or has some kind of deleterious side-effect on the user, for instance. Flaws will not be apparent without casting Analyze Magic on the item.

Slow and Sure Enchantment

This method of enchantment is also a form of ceremonial casting. It is much safer than the Quick and Dirty method, at the cost of increased time. An enchantment by this method usually takes multiple days (each day consisting of 8 hours of casting the enchantment, with the remainder available for other activities like sleeping, eating, etc.).

Each day of casting, each caster in the circle may contribute any amount of energy up to his Recovery Number plus any energy drained from a single powerstone during the day. At the end of the day's casting, the caster makes a Fright Check as if that energy had been spent on a completed spellcasting, although the actual skill roll is not made until the casting is complete.

The final spellcasting roll for the enchantment is made at the end of the day on which the energy cost of the enchantment is met, and the final Fright Check for each caster is made after that roll, with the usual modifiers if the roll fails.

Spectators cannot assist with a Slow and Sure enchantment, only skilled casters working as full members of a circle may do so. If the final casting roll for a Slow and Sure enchantment fails, the effort and any materials, including the item being enchanted, are wasted. If the item already had an enchantment on it, the item and the original enchantment may survive: roll against the Power of the pre-existing enchantment to see if it does. If there are multiple pre-existing enchantments, roll against the weakest to see if all of them survive.

Rituals

The Alternate Magic Ritual Rule in the sidebar of p. M7 is used instead of the standard ritual rules which reduce the required ritual with increasing skill. In addition, the caster can halve the casting time for each -5 penalty taken to skill.

New/Modified Spells

All Magery prerequisites are replaced with prerequisites based on the Thaumatology skill. A prerequisite of Magery becomes "Thaumatology 12+", a prerequisite of Magery 2 becomes "Thaumatology 15+", and a prerequisite of Magery 3 becomes "Thaumatology 18+".

Otherwise, most spells written for the standard GURPS magic system can be used in this system without further modification. However, a few spells require special attention. In particular, spells whose effects are designed around the relation between fatigue and magic energy in the standard system need to be re-examined to work well with this system.

Healing Spells

Lend Strength   Regular

Allows the caster to restore the subject's lost fatigue, at the expense of fatiguing himself. For each point of fatigue restored to the subject, the caster takes one point of fatigue.
Cost: 1; allows caster to transfer as many points of fatigue as he desires.
Prerequisite: Thaumatology 12+; or the Empathy advantage.

Recover Strength   Regular

The subject of this spell (which may be the mage himself) recovers fatigue faster while under the influence of this spell. The subject must be resting quietly; he may not, for example, cast spells or even maintain spells that require concentration.
Cost: 2 for the subject to recover one point per 5 minutes of rest, 5 for one point per 2 minutes, 10 for one point per minute; same to maintain.
Time to Cast: 1 minute.

Duration: 10 minutes.
Prerequisite: Lend Strength.

Share Strength

This spell is changed to Share Power. See below.

Meta-Spells

Share Power   Regular

Allows another caster to serve as a conduit of energy for another mage's spellcasting. The subject of this spell is another character that can draw energy from the mage for the purpose of casting a spell. The subject may draw the energy the following turn as long as he is casting a spell; if the spell would not be completed on that turn, he may "hold" the energy to use when the casting is complete. The casting cost, skill roll, and Fright Check for this spell are made once the subject decides how much energy he will draw, up to a limit of the caster's Recovery Number (if he chooses a greater amount, he only gets the maximum and provides the rest himself!). Duration: Energy must be drawn in the turn following casting, cannot be maintained.
Cost: Twice the amount of energy drawn by the subject.
Prerequisite: Thaumatology 12+.

by Sean Punch/TL7

Art by USGS and Keith Johnson

GURPS rules lawyers please take note: we are now officially at tech level 8. Okay -- technically, we are not quite there yet. According to *Basic Set*, TL8 officially starts at the stroke of midnight on January 1, 2001 (see p. B185). However, those of you who are planning to submit manuscripts to SJ Games should note that it is now kosher to include TL8 technologies, characters with TL8 skills, and so on in material set in the present day. (In a few years, only *outdated* technologies and the skills of old fogies like me should be treated as TL7.)

Big, Little

Tech level 8 did not really happen quite the way we thought it would, however. Here is how we called it on p. B185, complete with some context:

> 7. Modern (1951-2000): nuclear energy, computer, laser, rockets
>
> 8. Spacefaring (2001-2050?): slower-than-light space travel, fusion power, implants
>
> 9. Starfaring: faster-than-light star travel, sentient computers, longevity, deteronic frombotzer

Except for the frombotzer, that seemed quite reasonable when it was written. But the TL system was created in 1985, and a lot can change in 15 years. In 1985, the biotech revolution had not shown its true face, "nanotechnology" was just a buzzword, futurists sincerely believed that we would see cheap fusion power "in our lifetime," and the Space Shuttle program still generated enough hype to fuel hopes for manned space travel.

From our vantage in 2000, it is clear that we will see what *GURPS* presently calls "TL9 biotech" within our lifetime. I personally know people who are working on nanotechnology for industrial use. The ETA on that? Sometime before 2025. And the R&D money that might have been spent on manned space travel, fusion power, and other "big science" has gone into "small science" -- the engineering of cells, molecules, and tiny machines.

We can admit when we're wrong, and we strive to fix our mistakes. Authors of *GURPS* material dealing with technology should note that as of the next printing of *Basic Set*, tech levels 7-9 will be defined as follows:

> 7. Modern (1951-2000): computer, laser, miniaturization, mature fission technology
>
> 8. Microscience (2001-2050?): AI, gengineering, longevity, micromachines, early fusion technology
>
> 9. Nanoscience: environmental engineering, nanomachines, sentient AI, mature fusion technology

I will say nothing about TL10 and beyond. That is so far in the future that we really have no reason to doubt (or to trust, especially) the definition on p. B185. After all, if predicting the final decade of TL7 proved a challenge in 1985, then it is likely futile to make authoritative statements about events 100 years from now! What we *can* say is that the

TL definitions on p. B185 focus heavily on space exploration-enabling technologies, but our statistical sample of one -- Earth -- has shown us that high population densities, post-industrial environmental concerns, and widespread access to powerful computers tend to push small-scale, introspective technologies ahead of large-scale space technologies. Those who want to go out on a limb and modify TL10+ are welcome to take this idea and run with it.

I Want My MNT!

The above correction would seem merely to displace the problem, though. Okay, so now we have *different* innovations proposed for tech levels 8 and 9, but it is apparent that the so-called TL8 technologies are not here yet! How is this an improvement? Here is an addition to the TL rules to cover that:

> The technologies assigned to a TL reflect *all* developments which will appear during that TL, from start to finish. Only the subset of TL*x* innovations which were being researched at late TL*x-1* will be available at the debut of TL*x*. The remainder of TL*x* technologies will be conceived of and wholly developed during TL*x*, possibly only at the end of TL*x*! By the same token, the least-advanced items from TL*x+1* will be R&D items late in TL*x*.

The savvy reader will recognize this as an endorsement of the "early TL*x*" and "late TL*x*" designations seen in various *GURPS* volumes on technology, notably *Vehicles*. We are embracing that system because it makes sense. In real life, technological growth is a continuous process, not a series of discrete transitions: radar and jets are TL6 (1901-1950), but appeared in the 1940s, not in 1901, and so are "late TL6." Rockets and nuclear power are TL7 (1951-2000), but they were R&D items in the 1930s and 1940s, and so are "early TL7."

Getting back to the present, the definitive technologies of TL8 include gengineering, micromachines, and early fusion technology. All of these were actual R&D topics in TL7; we have working models of all three as I write. Thus, we are at "early TL8" at the moment. Just hold on to your hats for a few years until the rest shows up! (Except for those darn power cells. Power cells canonically appear at TL8 in *GURPS*, but their energy densities tend to exceed subatomic binding energies, meaning that it would be impossible to build them from matter as we understand it. This puts them in the same category as matter transmission, FTL travel, and force manipulation. Realistic settings probably should not include them. At least not before TL10.)

My PhD in Burger Flipping

Finally, there is the issue of "/TL skills." What happens to *those* as we move from TL7 to TL8?

Tech Level 8 -- Then and Now

People educated at TL7 -- i.e., those possessing skills designated "/TL7" -- will continue to operate largely at TL7. Yes, they will take refresher courses, read journals, and generally try to scratch and claw their way back up the technology curve. This means that they will get the -5 default to use the TL8 versions of their skills, as mentioned on p. B185. Realistically, slackers (such as those with the Laziness disadvantage) will probably end up with the same defaults as the untrained; e.g., the lazy chemist will have Chemistry/TL8 at IQ-6 instead of at Chemistry/TL7-5. GMs should not feel compelled to enforce strict realism, but the fact is that time stops for no man, skills do grow obsolete, and a sudden innovation in a field does not upgrade the skills of those working in that area. Yes, this means that an increasing number of characters will sport "Primitive (-1 TL) [-5 points]" in realistic campaigns. GMs should consider not counting this

toward disadvantage limits.

On the other hand, those who are just starting their eduction here at the dawn of TL8 -- yes, those screaming 5-year-olds starting school this autumn, and even those annoying 12-year-old mall rats -- will have honest-to-goodness "/TL8" skills when they are handed their diplomas in the 2010s and 2020s. The first truly TL8 generation will hit the workforce in 2020 or 2025 . . . by which time many of us will be able to hide our low-tech skills in cushy management positions (Administration is *not* a "/TL skill") or retirement (neither is Golf).

Don't say I didn't warn you.

Kith of the Spider Woman

"If you wish to live and thrive,
Let the spider run alive."
-- Kentish proverb

It's no doubt characteristic of my mind that I read that couplet not as a simple "good luck" verse, but as something along the lines of a threat. Much as we refer to the Faerie as the "good folk" to keep them from behaving like the bad folk they are, the enterprising folklorist (or GM) can find plenty of strands with which to darken the web of mythography around the "lucky" spiders. The ensuing exercise in pseudo-anthropological paranoia can wind up buttressing any secretive spider-cult (from Clark Ashton Smith's Atlach-Nacha to E. Gary Gygax' Lolth) or Hidden Arachnid Race in your game. You say you don't have a secretive spider-cult or Hidden Arachnid Race in your game? Well, now you do.

"There may be in the cup
A spider steep'd, and one may drink, depart,
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
Is not infected . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale,* II:i:41-44

Spider goddesses (spiders are nearly always goddesses) sit in the center of a vast web indeed. At their most numinous, they spin out the very stuff of existence; the web of the Hindu virgin spider-goddess Maya can be likened to the Wheel of Fate, of magic, of appearance and illusion (also known as "maya" in Buddhist thought). The Norse Norns, and the Greek Fates, also have the spindle and loom (represented by -- or representing -- the spiderweb) as their symbols and tools of office. Just as the spider creates her web from within her belly, many of the spider goddesses created the world, from the Chaldean Orore, to Areop-Enap on the Pacific island of Nauru, to Hatai Wugti of the Zuni, to Tule of the African Azande. Even those spider goddesses not explicitly given the job of creating the world often supplied it with key ingredients such as fire, as in the Cherokee stories of Grandmother Spider, Kanene Ski Amai Yehi. Most of the rest of the arachnid deities, such as Ix Chebel Yax, a spidery Maya moon-goddess, brought mankind the arts of the loom and spindle.

Perhaps the best known spider myth is that of Arachne, a mortal weaver who boasted that her blasphemous tapestries surpassed those of Athena, goddess of weaving. Athena, unable to find fault with them, angrily turned Arachne into a spider. This story may represent the supplanting by Athena of an earlier spider-goddess of Miletus, where spider-icons have turned up going back to 2000 B.C. or so. (There are odd eight-legged chevron patterns on loom-weights found in Bulgaria as far back as 5000 B.C.) Or it may just reinforce the notion of spiders as equal to even the gods in power, but somehow "wrong" or "different" or dangerous. It's worth noting also that Circe, the great enchantress who ensnared Odysseus, is first seen weaving, and that Odysseus' wife Penelope (whose name means "web over her face") wove a death-shroud by day (and un-wove it by night) to keep her suitors suspended in time (caught in her web?) until Odysseus returned. A particularly unsavory legend implies that Penelope became the mother of Pan, god of fearsome nature, after sleeping with every suitor in turn. These spider-women weave powerful magic, it seems.

"Their webs shall not become garments, neither shall they cover themselves with their works: their works are works of iniquity, and the act of violence is in their hands. Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood: their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity; wasting and destruction are in their paths. The way of peace they know not; and there is no judgment in their goings: they have made them crooked paths: whosoever goeth therein shall not know peace."
-- Isaiah 59:6-8

In fact, they seem downright spooky when you start adding in the various Trickster spiders. Biluku, an equivocal spider goddess of the Andaman Islands, invented fire but refused to share it with mankind; the trickster Melanesian spider goddess Marawa tricked mankind out of immortality. The Ashanti claim that Anansi, the Spider, is a jovial male trickster-god, but in Haitian vodoun, Anansi became the androgynous and aptly-named Ti-Malice ("little malice"), and

in the Carolina Gullah culture "he" reverted to true goddess-hood as "Aunt Nancy." It can't just be me that hears an echo here of the Greek goddess Ananké, personification of (and weaver of) inevitable fate. Ananké, in fact, is a later form of a Phrygian mountain-goddess Adrasteia ("the inescapable"), the avenger of all wrongs -- wrongs, mayhap, like killing spiders. Where Phrygian mountain-goddesses come up, we shouldn't be too surprised to see traces of the dark goddess Cybele, who messily devours her lover Attis much as the black widow does her own mate. A spider emblematizes, in fact, Cybele's Syrian manifestation Atargatis, and an eight-legged cross represents the Babylonian Great Goddess Ishtar. Speaking of devouring mothers, of course, the Hindu goddess Kali not only destroys the world under cover of night (just as Penelope does her woven universe) but actually has (at least) eight limbs! And Kali's death-cultists, the Thuggee, killed their victims with either a pickaxe (recalling the puncturing mandible of a spider) or a sacred garrotte cord (recapitulating the deadly thread of a spider).

After all of that, it's almost a relief to run across the Egyptian goddess Neith, identified with the spider (and, by the Greeks, with Athena). Neith not only shares the patronage of weaving with her arachnid sisters, she is also a goddess of war (like Kali, or like Adrasteia's Celtic sister Adraste, to whom Boudicca sacrificed captured Roman women), an "opener of the way" for the dead (much like Penelope on the cusp of creation and uncreation), and a goddess of primordial chaos and creation. The inscription on her temple at Sais (where the spider-cultist Milesians had a trading post) reads "I am the Universe, Past, Present and Future; no mortal made the acquaintance of me." Spider-cultists of the Pyramids, anyone?

"One of the names of the Vulture of Neith is Nru. *According to Hor-Apollo the Egyptians symbolized the Mother by a Vulture 'because there is no male in this race of creatures,' which could be interpreted as meaning that the vulture represented a type of conception not wholly human. Nru is numerically 256, which equates it with the Voodou Spider Goddess possessed of 256 kalas."*
-- Kenneth Grant, *Outer Gateways*

In fact, traditional Christian lore has always known just what to think of spiders -- they're evil. The spider was clearly identified as a demon of lust, one which turned into a prostitute. In one celebrated witch-trial, the accused was found guilty of parroting advice from a spider on his shoulder; well before that, the tarantula spider had been identified as the cause of the "tarantella" form of "dancing madness" that swept through southern Italy in the 14th century. (Parallels with voodooistic trance dances for Ti-Malice, or with the ecstasies of Pan's Maenads, imply that the tarantellists may have been cultists, rather than victims, of the spider sorceries.) The medieval kings most closely identified with spiders were fairly unsavory folk; Louis XI "the Spider King" of France created the autocratic regime that led to Revolution, while Robert "the Spider" Bruce only won the throne of Scotland after killing a man who had claimed sanctuary -- and after seeing a spider spin seven webs. (He was also in cahoots with the Templars, whose cross pattee has eight points.) Even the Latin for spider, "aranea," has echoes of Aradia, the Queen of the Night and Air.

Outside Europe, it's much the same; "spider" kabbalistically (OKBYSh) adds to 402, which is the same as "daughter" in Hebrew, or as Set-Aiwaz (the entity who inspired Aleister Crowley), and lies nestled between 401 (the curse) and 403 (the Philosopher's Stone). The spider's web, QWRY OKBYSh, adds to 718, the Abomination of Desolation -- the Kingdom of the Antichrist. None of this would surprise the Malekulans of New Guinea, who must fill in a puzzle-pattern in the sand before Lehevhev, the man-eating spider who guards the mouth of the afterlife; or the Japanese, who learned to fear Tsuchi-Gumo, the spider woman who seduced men and then killed them. Even tribes of Amazon Indians pass warily under the eyes of Ituana, their own arachnid goddess -- and it's an interesting coincidence to note that the warrior-women Amazons, according to Pomponius Mela, also killed men by dragging them in nets.

"Are you aware that the super-brain you refer to is that of the Spider Queen of Space, worshiped on this planet only by renegade cults such as the Obeah branch of Voodoo, and some disciples of Aleister Crowley?"
-- George C. Andrews, "Response to Winston Sarafian," in *Extra-Terrestrial Friends and Foes*

The net-wielding warrior women, the shapeshifting spider seductresses, the eight limbs of Kali and the worldwide connection between websters and sorcery all point to an unseelie race of arachnids living among us in secret. Here's where the legends of [Berchta] -- a weaving goddess symbolized by a net -- living beneath a mountain in Germany come in. To Tannhauser, of course, she was Venus, and the mountain the Venusberg. Venus, not terribly coincidentally, is represented by an eight-pointed star, and should also be triggering our UFO alarm about now. Could

the Spider Women be aliens?

There are an awful lot of arachnid culture heroes, bringing everything from fire to the seeds of the earth to the always-handy art and craft of weaving cloth. (Or, translated, energy, genomes, and nanotechnology.) Spider-goddesses like Athena and Neith were anciently associated with wisdom: Plato says the records of Atlantis are stored in secret halls in the temple of Neith at Sais. In this connection, the Cour d'Alene Indians have an allusive tale of the Spider Women who "live in the sky" helping the son of Coyote to avenge the cuckolding of his wife (shades of Odysseus, a different trickster hero) by teaching him how to "descend to the earth in a box."

So what we have here, for tales ranging from *GURPS Egypt* to *GURPS Illuminati* and beyond, is a shapeshifting race of alien spider-women from, let's say, Zeta Reticulum (A reticulum, of course, is a net, or a web). They crashed on Earth; for whatever reason, be it cultural or biological, they brought only females with them. To stay alive and reproduce, they must devour or vampirize humans, especially human males (hence the legend of the net-wielding Amazons raiding villages for babies). Working in secret, a small group of them have infiltrated selected civilizations, setting up puppet rulers like Robert the Bruce. Some live in underground bases, others in a gossamer interdimensional ship that simultaneously creates and destroys matter. Still others have decayed and become monstrosities, a fitting target for Black Ops teams or jut-jawed *GURPS Atomic Horror* colonels who don't mind risking the Kin of the Spider Woman.

Combat -- Round Two: FIGHT!, and The Last Play Dirty

For those of you looking for the last Play Dirty, scroll down past my incoherent ramblings.

I saw the movie *Blade* (Wesley Snipes, vampires) for the first time this week, and several questions popped to mind.

1. Why am I watching this?!?
2. What's a millennia-old ritual site doing on the outskirts of LA?
3. Do the combats in this movie *work*?

I will leave it to the great philosophers to try to puzzle out the first two questions, but I did work out the answer to the third question.

"Sort of."

Now, Blade is a typical action movie, meaning that you know from the beginning the protagonist may suffer some setbacks, but he'll never be seriously challenged. He's one bad mutha, that Blade.

A lot of adventure game combats/sessions/adventures/campaigns are like that; the PCs may lose some hit points, or be otherwise inconvenienced, but otherwise they'll never be terribly challenged . . . not really. Even if a PC dies, in many games that just doesn't *mean* much. "Drat! Time to come up with Thugneck Strongarm the Third!"

So most action movies follow the trend regarding combat I mentioned last week:

The protagonist wins. Story continues.
The protagonist dies. Short movie.

But one movie (or movie series, if you'd prefer) changed my mind regarding that, and, for the first time, allowed me to concoct combats that were *really* as interesting to me as other aspects of gaming.

That movie was *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.

(Or, if you prefer [though I don't know why you would], *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark*.)

I saw that movie again with fresh eyes a few years ago, and realized some things.

1. As a watcher, I *knew*, at any given time, that Indy wasn't going to die.
2. Beyond that, I had no clue what was going to happen next.

And it was for a reason that combined with a concept I'd learned in a creative writing class: secondary level of action. Basically, the secondary level of action says that, in a play, movie, or book, you should consider having *something* else going on while characters are interacting.

So consider for a simple lame example:

"Do you have the plans?" asked Agent Uiop.
"Yes; they are in the briefcase," said Agent Qwerty.
"Give me the briefcase," said Agent Uiop.
"No," said Agent Qwerty.
"I have a gun," said Agent Uiop.
"Yes. You do," said Agent Qwerty.

Agent Uiop shot Agent Qwerty twice and ran into the night with the briefcase.

Now combine this with a secondary level of action, you get:

"Do you have the plans?" asked Agent Uiop.
"Yes; they are in the briefcase," said Agent Qwerty, his voice lowering to a whisper as the server approached.
"What can I get you?" she asked. "We have Key Lime Pie on special."
"I don't want anything," said Agent Uiop, drumming his fingers impatiently and looking at the briefcase.
"I'm sorry, sir, but you have to order something to stay here," the server said insistently.
"Coffee, then," he said.
"Regular or Decaf?"
"Regular. Black. Now."
"Oh-kay," she said, pivoting on her heel to the other patron. "And you?" she asked.
"I'll have coffee, too. And a piece of the Key Lime Pie, please," said Agent Qwerty as he cradled the briefcase in his lap under the table.
The waitress wrote the order down and walked away.
"Give me the briefcase," said Agent Uiop, looking nervously at the waitress.
"No," said Agent Qwerty. He unfolded his napkin and placed it in his lap.
"I have a gun," said Agent Uiop, noticing the waitress returning with a coffee.
"Yes. You do," said Agent Qwerty to Uiop. Then, turning his attention to the server, he said, "Can I ask you a few questions?"
"Sure," she said, as Agent Qwerty fumed in anticipation of getting the plans, his hand slowly reaching into his trenchcoat.

Although it's *still* a lame example, at least it's an exciting lame example. What's going to happen next? Is the waitress going to get caught in the crossfire? Is she going to be involved in the fighting? What about the rest of the restaurant?

This was the beauty of the good Indy films; in most scenes, you didn't know *what* was going to happen, because there was usually something else going on that could affect the outcome. And that "something" was usually a secondary goal or objective. Would they make it onto the plane? Would Indy recover the antidote *or* the diamond? Would young Indy get the Cross?

And, in this one realization, I was able to make combats much more interesting (for me, at any rate). Suddenly, by just adding *something* else to the mix, I was able to increase the level of uncertainty.

I personally have a hard time killing PCs, but what about the NPC they've been assigned to guard? What if they need to keep the President from getting kidnapped by zombies? What if the train they need to catch is pulling away at the moment they're attacked by ninjas? What if the building they're in catches fire at the same time Captain Badguy chooses to attack? What if the rampaging monster is really the PCs ally; do they use lethal force?

Now, not every combat needs to be a three-ringed circus. But combats seldom happen in a vacuum; if there's a reason for combat, then that reason doesn't necessarily need to remain passively on the sidelines while the combat occurs. (Of course, multiple levels of action are easier in some systems than others; **GURPS**, for example, with its one-second combat rounds, are challenging for me to work around. "All right; the train moves away in two minutes." "So? That's 120 combat rounds!")

In all, I'm not a fan of "mundane" combats, but I've come to see the value in viewing combats as being potentially as unpredictable and exciting as any other transactions.

* * *

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The Last Play Dirty

Well, this is the time when I have to say goodbye. I've been struggling with a way to do this, and I just can't find the words. But, ours is a relationship built on trust, and like all relationships, this one has run its course.

Over the past month and a half, I've discovered I have nothing new to offer you. Well, that's not exactly true. I've written a couple of things, but none of them are really what I'd call "quality work." See, despite what some may think, I do have a set of standards about my writing. And, frankly, the stuff I've been writing for you just hasn't been able to cut the mustard. I hear some of you asking, "Why?"

Well, the answers aren't as simple as the question. Writing about one subject for over a year - that's a lot of it, I think. It's not that I don't have anything more to say on the subject, it's just that . . . well, a GM has to keep some of his secrets.

I also think a lot of it has to do with the fact I have a new job. Working at Totally Games is a lot more demanding on my creative energies than a foster care agency. Also, deep down inside, I think there's a bit of me that won't let me write for Pyramid because I don't own the columns. They belong to Steve Jackson when the day is done, and I did make a promise to The Wife I wouldn't do any more work I didn't own; even if it is a monthly column of GM advice.

So, this is where we say goodbye. I'm sure Play Dirty will show up again some day. I'll get an itch that only this column can scratch, or Mr. Marsh will find someone else to take over the chore.

Take good care of yourselves, and your players, and don't forget: you always hurt the one you love.

And, as Tyler Durden taught us, the reverse is also true.

--   *John W.*
                 9/14/00

I'm reminded of the (sadly ironic, in retrospect) exchange between Bond and Q in the most recent James Bond film, *The World is Not Enough*:

Bond: You're not retiring any time soon, are you?
Q: Now pay attention, 007. I've always tried to teach you two things. First, never let them see you bleed.
Bond: And the second?

Q: Always have an escape plan!

As a creator, I feel it's definitely better to "escape" before you dip below a level you're happy with . . . a lesson too many novelists, directors, and others fail to realize. Good luck, John!

We're not sure what he means about us "owning" the column, because that's not the way the Pyramid writing deal works -- see our [writers' guidelines](). We buy electronic rights and a limited right of first refusal on paper reprints, and that's all. I got John's column just a few of hours ago, and have replied to John, but hopefully the misunderstanding isn't the real reason he's dropping the column!

At any rate, thanks, John, for giving me lots of ideas and making me think more than most. I *still* can't watch *Star Wars* without thinking, "What's good-hearted, sweet-faced Ben Kenobi trying to do there? He's using the Old Jedi Mindtrick!"

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Dungeons & Dragons Computer Labyrinth Game** (Electronic game from Mattel)

(Three stars) "Especially ambitious GMs might also consider exposing their players to Jamaican *food*."

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Pick

Demon City Shinjuku: Role-Playing Game and Resource Book

Published by **Guardians of Order**

Written by David L. Pulver (with Mark C. MacKinnon, Jeff Mackintosh, Karen A. McLarney)

150 pages, $19.95

In 1988 the anime feature film *Makai Toshi Shinjuku* was released in Japan. Based on a novel by Hideyuki Kikuchi (a Japanese SF/Horror author), Shinjuku told the story of Kyoya, a young student of the mystic combat art of Nempo.

Ten years before the film begins, Kyoya's father (a Nempo master himself) attempted to prevent Levih Rah (a Nempo master who had turned to evil) from summoning demonic powers to conquer the Earth. He dies in the attempt, but not before he disrupts Levih Rah's spell. Instead of conquering all of humanity in a single blow, Rah is only able to summon his demonic horde to a localized area . . . the Shinjuku district of downtown Tokyo. A massive earthquake wreaks devastation across dozens of city blocks, and Rah begins to prepare for the day when his dreams of conquest will reach true fruition. Now, a decade later, Kyoya must venture into this modern city of the damned, and finish what his father started . . .

Several years after the film's original release, Central Park Media translated it into English as Demon City Shinjuku. In America, as in Japan before it, Shinjuku quickly became a classic of both its medium and genre. And now, twelve years later, Guardians of Order has presented us with the *Demo n City Shinjuku Roleplaying Game and Resource Book*.

Demon City Shinjuku is not the first, nor will it be the last, of GoO's licensed anime games (it was preceded by *Sailor Moon* and *Dominion: Tank Police*, and has been followed by *Tenchi Muyo!*). Like these other games, *Demon City Shinjuku* uses the Tri-Stat System which first appeared in the critically acclaimed *Big Eyes, Small Mouth*.

Action resolution is handled in a fairly standard and straight-forward manner: A roll of 2d6 is modified by a difficulty and compared to the appropriate Stat or Skill. Combat uses the same basic mechanic to determine the relative effectiveness of attack and defense. Damage is determined through the combination of a secondary attribute and the weapon's damage rating. One nice touch throughout the game are two simple flowcharts (one for combat and one for character creation) which clearly and concisely summarize the rules for easy reference during gameplay.

Character creation is based primarily on three things: Three character Stats (Body, Mind, and Soul -- hence the name "Tri-Stat"), Character Attributes, and Skills. Each of these systems is point-based, with fairly broad and open-ended definitions. For example, your character might have a Level 3 in Massive Damage -- allowing you increase your damage in combat by 15 points because you know precisely where to land a blow to cause the maximum possible amount of damage. However, precisely how your character knows how to land such a blow is left open-ended -- they might have trained in the martial arts; or perhaps they receive mystic insight into where to land each blow.

This system is mechanically very precise while, simultaneously, modeling a wide variety of phenomena in the *Demon City Shinjuku* universe in a simple and easy-to-use manner. In addition, a great amount of care has been taken so that the elements of the game system will interact in exactly the manner shown in the movie -- if doing X and Y in the movie allowed a character to achieve Z, then doing X and Y with the game system will also result in Z.

As impressive as the system is, though, the ***Demon City Shinjuku Roleplaying Game*** really begins to shine when we reach the second part of its title: ***Resource Book***.

In addition to simply presenting a roleplaying game for their licensed products, Guardians of Order also present their books as generic resources for fans of the source material. In addition to creating a higher potential for the development of a crossover market of anime fans interested in purchasing the book, this also lends to the book a true depth of source material which is often lacking in licensed products. Instead of simply covering the material found in the movie, GoO has taken the next logical step of supporting the movie with a wide variety of supporting details -- exactly the type of details which a GM craves when running an adventure.

While doing this, however, they have very carefully not imposed a vision of Demon City Shinjuku beyond the confines of the movie. Instead they have presented a wide-open toolbox with which a GM can create their own version of the Demon City Shinjuku universe. By doing so they don't lock the property into their own vision of "how things are supposed to be," instead opening it up to a multitude of visions limited only by the extent of your own imagination and desire. Want a campaign where Shinjuku was only one of many cities struck by Levih Rah's spell? You'll find support for it here. Want a campaign set in the years between Levih Rah's spell and Kyoya's success? You'll find support for it here. Want a campaign where Kyoya failed? You'll find support for it here. And so forth.

Moving beyond this toolbox, they have provided a wealth of real world information on Japan and Tokyo. This is, essentially, the foundation on which the movie is built -- and by stripping away the surface of the movie, and revealing the pylons on which it was constructed, GoO is giving you the same firm base with which to build your own campaign.

By doing this, GoO has proven -- once again -- that they are capable of looking at things with the eye of a master game designer: Finding the basic elements which make up an experience, and laying them bare for you to use in the easiest fashion possible. The result is a high quality product which is, above all else, useful as a gaming resource.

So, at the end of the day, what is ***Demon City Shinjuku***? It's a tried and proven rule system which has been expertly adapted into a near-perfect adaptation of a licensed property. It's a property which is, in turn, rich with gaming opportunities -- demons on the loose in a mystic post-Armageddon setting with gothic horror themes. It's presented in a dynamic and open-ended fashion -- remaining true to the source material, while simultaneously facilitating a diverse set of visions.

It is, in one hundred and fifty pages, a rich and worthy addition to your library of gaming experiences.

-- Justin Bacon

It Came From the Deeps

by Glenn St-Germain

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Alex Fernandez

This *GURPS Space* adventure is for four to six characters of 100 to 125 points. However, as the scenario places an emphasis on investigation and character interaction rather than combat, characters of higher point levels will not unbalance the scenario too badly. The adventure requires the characters to be in an area of space not far outside the fringes of "known space," in an area that is just being explored. The scenario itself takes place on the planet Aqualine, the site of a lost human colony. Aqualine is a water world with a pleasant, temperate climate, with one large island and several small ones; the large island is settled.

One more thing: the scenario requires that one of the ship's crew be "sacrificed," albeit temporarily. This should be a major NPC if possible. (If the scenario is being run during a session where one of the regular players is absent for some reason, that player's character would also be an ideal candidate for the "sacrifice.")

Welcome to Aqualine

The party arrives into the system in their ship. A quick survey of the system reveals that this is a binary star, a spectral class G main star and its class M red dwarf companion orbiting at a distance of just under 30 astronomical units. Orbiting the main star are a handful of planets, the third of which is Earthlike.

Investigating the planet more closely, they discover that the world is almost completely covered with water. There are a few island chains here and there. The largest island, if examined from orbit, shows patters of cultivation. A scan of the radio frequencies will reveal an automated radio beacon signal being broadcast from the southwest corner of the island, where a town is located. The nature of the beacon is similar to a navigational beacon of the type found at class 1 starports, but outdated.

The planetary starport, if it can be called that, is nothing more than a flat area of cleared ground a few kilometers outside the town, with markings in contrasting stone indicating a landing place. The beacon is broadcast from a shack located to one side of the landing area. At the time the players make contact, the shack will be manned by a radio operator by the name of Verd, who will initially believe that one of the other radio operators on the planet is playing a joke on him. He will be sarcastic, but amused, and invite the PC's to land their ship. Once he realizes that the PC's contact is not a joke, he will immediately use his radio to contact the town.

The party will be met by the Mayor of Kreshburg (the town near the starport) and an entourage that includes a brass band, who play celebration music -- off key -- as the party disembarks from their ship. The Mayor, a short, balding man by the name of Bel Torin, will welcome the visitors and call for a celebration, explaining that the party's appearance is the first visit to the planet by a spaceship since Torin was a small boy.

If there are any non-humans in the player characters' party, the residents will initially be apprehensive. None of them have ever seen a non-human sentient; few are aware that they even exist. However, if the non-human reacts in a

friendly manner, the people will quickly become at ease, though some will still keep their distance. On the other hand, children will find the non-human(s) fascinating, and any non-human player character will soon find him/herself surrounded by a group of 10 or 12 kids.

Life on Aqualine

The island is simply known as Big Island. Over 100 years earlier, the colony ship Artemis landed here after experiencing problems with its engines; this system was not the Artemis' intended destination. However, having found an earthlike world suitable for habitation, the Artemis offloaded its cargo of colonists, equipment, and supplies. The original landing spot is located in a park just outside the town of Kreshburg, which has a population of about 5,000 people.

The operational tech level here is equivalent to a late 19th-century Earth, with an agrarian economy. There is little in the way of industry. Most of the machinery dates back to the original colony equipment, and much of it still works, though some repairs have been jury-rigged. The farm combines still work, for example, and are more useful in working the fields than any other method; the machinery is rotated around the island as needed. A geothermal tap built by the original colonists provides the island with electricity.

The planetary population now stands at about 40,000, with the only inhabited islands being Big Island and its nearest neighbor, called Next Island, a few miles north. The land is arable. The seas teem with edible fish and other sea life. Life is peaceful, happy, and a little on the dull side. The Mayor of Kreshburg is the de facto leader of the planet. Bel Torin has run unopposed for three consecutive terms, and the arrival of the visitors is the most exciting thing to happen in a very long time. Aqualine has not had any visitors in about 35 local years -- 52 years, Earth standard. The last visitor was a passing merchant vessel, an event that most of the people on the planet are too young to remember, if they were even alive then.

A group called the "Radio Men" keep the knowledge of technology alive. They act as teachers of science and repair technicians for the machinery, and man the radio network that the population uses to communicate across distances. The small shack next to the landing area, from which the beacon broadcast, is usually manned by one of the Radio Men during the daytime, just in case someone drops by to visit.

Party on the Beach

The player characters have arrived a couple of days before this year's Founder's Day, an annual celebration commemorating the founding of the colony. The visitors will of course be invited. The main celebration takes the form of a party on the beach at Lagoona, a village near the southeast corner of the island, at a large natural lagoon. There will be much feasting and rejoicing as the Mayor and the rest of the inhabitants ply information about human space from them. They will also offer the characters food for their continued trip in exchange for some technical help, as a few of their machines have broken down that no one knows how to do. (Any starship engineer or anyone with a mechanical skill should be able to repair these without trouble.)

The high point of the festivities is the "tribute." Every year, one of the teenaged residents is elected "King" or "Queen" of the festival, alternating between King and Queen from one year to the next. This year, Leeza Teller is the Queen. At a festive ceremony, Leeza is taken to the end of a long, makeshift dock along with crates of seeds and foodstuffs. A short time later, a large sea monster appears, opens its gaping maw, and attempts to take Leeza, the crates, and part of the dock into its mouth. However, one of the members of the spaceship crew (the NPC to be "sacrificed") will be close enough to the dock and react quickly enough to push her away to safety, only to be consumed himself!

The Mayor will be furious with the visitors, and he will demand that they leave immediately. The rest of the population will also be hostile, with a few exceptions. Leeza Teller will be happy that her life has been saved. And the Radio Men will be acting a little strangely, as if they're hiding something. This is because they have a secret: the Artemis itself is still on the planet.

The Artemis

The missing crewman is, in fact, being held in what's left of the Artemis, which is half-buried on a rocky island about 50 miles north of Big Island. When the Artemis first landed near what is now Kreshburg, the colonists and all their supplies were offloaded while the crew tried to restart the ship's engines. They managed to get them restarted, but were unable to move very far; the ship crashed -- again -- this time on one of the other islands. Since then, rockslides have mostly buried the ship; some of these rockslides instigated by its residents, who call themselves the Crew. The Crew number just under 100, and live in the hulk of the Artemis. They eke out a meager existence on their island; the amount of arable land there is small, and the Crew are barely able to grow enough food for themselves. Any seeds from the food they grow wind up sterile. In fact, anyone born on Artemis Island is also sterile; were it not for the fresh seeds and new people for their gene pool every year, the Crew would have died out long ago. This is because of a radiation leak from the ship's engines (which still provides residual power inside the ship). The existence of the leak (and in fact, the understanding of what's wrong) is not known to the Crew.

The Crew have modified the appearance of an Artemis shuttlecraft to resemble a giant sea monster. While this would not fool anyone who saw it up close, to anyone on the beach at Lagoona when it shows up, it appears convincing enough. The shuttlecraft can submerge, and fly short distances, but is no longer capable of reaching orbit.

Even with the annual "tribute" from the main colony, the colony on Artemis Island is dying out. The leader of the Crew, called The Captain, is aware of this problem and has been trying to think of a solution. The biggest obstacle: the Crew think of the colonists on Big Island as "Cargo," and believe it to be beneath them to associate with them. They do grudgingly accept the annual addition to their population, knowing that the alternative would be the end of their own colony. Many of the Artemis Island colonists think that they should move to the main island and merge with the Cargo; however, many are totally opposed to this idea, including the Captain's second-in-command, Number One.

If the players search the other islands, or try to trace the source of the radio signal they received from their shipmate, they should be able to find Artemis Island without much problem. When they arrive, they will find the surface deserted. Once they find the entrance to the Artemis, they will be met by several Crew brandishing energy weapons (none of which work), who will try to bluff and intimidate the PCs. If they are attacked with hand-to-hand combat, they will reply in kind. If the PCs fire a weapon, even a warning shot, they will break and run. If the characters press on further, members of the Crew will attempt to ambush and corner the party -- they know the layout of the ship, after all. However, if anyone in the party announces that they just want to talk, the Captain will be summoned. In this case, the Captain will arrive, accompanied by Number One.

The Crew themselves are dressed in plain black slacks with color-coded tunics, all in poor condition. The Captain's shirt, black, has ratty gold trim on it; Number One's shirt, dark blue, has a large numeral "1" on the front and back, like a football jersey, in white.

The campaign NPC has been very well treated (despite the fact that they expected a female "sacrifice" this year), and has been "forced" to contribute to the local gene pool (though it is likely that not much force was required . . .). He will be glad to see his shipmates, and he can fill in the details about the Artemis and its crew to the rest of the party.

It should be pointed out to the GM that everyone aboard the Artemis by now is descended from Cargo; were that not the case, the Crew would have died out decades ago. This bit of information will be enough to convince the Captain to

abandon ship and try living on the surface. But so far, no one has pointed that out to him, nor has anyone aboard the ship thought of that themselves.

One of the Crew, the Comm Officer, is in regular contact with the Radio Men above. The Radio Men are the only members of the main population who are aware of the Artemis, and they have sworn to keep its existence a secret. If the Crew ultimately decide to relocate, the Radio Men will own up to the deception and offer to assist in any way they can. There are several islands that would make a suitable landhold for the Crew if/when they decide to move to the surface, and Big Island still has plenty of room. With some tact and diplomacy, the PCs should be able to broker a solution to the problem.

Major Characters

Bel Torin, Mayor of Kreshburg

ST 9, **DX** 11, **IQ** 13, **HT** 9

48 years old. Pale skin, gray hair (balding), blue eyes. 5'6" tall, 140 lbs.

Advantages: Charisma, 1 level; Status, +2 (Mayor)
Disadvantages: Sense of duty (planet population)
Skills: Administration-14, Politics-12, Driving (farm equipment)-11, Teamster- 12, Diplomacy-13

40 points

Bel Torin has been the Mayor of Kreshburg for over 13 years now. He is a friendly, outgoing sort who is very popular with the locals. He is a people person, who is always ready to mediate a dispute or offer useful advice. His tenure as Mayor has been uneventful, as nothing exciting has happened on the planet in recent memory, until the arrival of the player characters in their ship. He takes his job as Mayor seriously, and believes his most important role to be keeping the well-being and morale of the populace. In his vocal and physical mannerisms, he would remind some people of a certain alien "morale officer" aboard a lost spaceship in another universe . . . but that's another story.

Zak Darno, head Radio Man

ST 8, **DX** 9, **IQ** 16, **HT** 7

84 years old. Pale skin, white hair, gray eyes. 6'0" tall, 150 lbs.

Advantages: Status, +1 (Radio Man); Mathematical Ability
Disadvantages: Secret (knowledge of the Artemis); Age (-102 points)
Skills: Woodworking-11, Naturalist-15, Astronomy-15 (limited by local tech level), Botany-16, History-16 (Aqualine history only), Mathematics-16, Meteorology-18, Teaching-16, Electronics Operation (Communications)-16

-30 points

As the oldest resident of the planet, Zak is revered by many of the populace, who see him as a teacher, historian, and all-round "wise man." People trust him implicitly. He was a young man in his late 20s when the last ship came by, a merchant vessel, and he will be most interested in finding out the latest gossip about "back home" whence the Artemis originally came. His health is failing, and he is aware of it, but he has kept that knowledge to himself so as to not alarm the others. He believes it to be a sacred duty to keep the secret of the Artemis, so that it is known only to himself and the dozen or so other "Radio Men" on the planet.

Verd Enkar, Radio Man

ST 12, **DX** 14, **IQ** 14, **HT** 10

33 years old. Tanned skin, black hair, brown eyes. 6'1" tall, 180 lbs.

Advantages: Status, +1 (Radio Man); Alertness
Disadvantages: Laziness; Secret (knowledge of the Artemis)
Skills: Electronics Operation (Communications)-14, Teaching-12, Meteorology-12, Astronomy-14, History-14 (Aqualine history only), Blacksmith-12

100 points

Verd is young, single, and enjoys the special status of being a Radio Man, perhaps more so than he should. However, he is competent at his job, and is generally well-liked by the others. He will be eager to hear stories about space and other worlds from the visitors. If there are any non-humans among the visitors, he will be fascinated, and want to know everything about them.

Leeza Teller, Founders Day Queen

ST 9, **DX** 12, **IQ** 10, **HT** 12

18 years old. Peaches-and-cream complexion, auburn hair, green eyes. 5'5," 118 lbs.

Advantages: Beautiful appearance
Disadvantages: Combat Paralysis, Shyness
Skills: Agronomy-8, Sex Appeal-12

30 points

Leeza is the youngest daughter of a local farmer; her parents are very proud that she was chosen to be the Queen this year. However, Leeza herself was less than thrilled. Her boyfriend Karb was the King the previous year, and she still misses him. (He's alive and well aboard the Artemis, and will be very glad to see her when reunited with her.)

The Captain

ST 12, **DX** 13, **IQ** 11, **HT** 7

38 years old, pale complexion, brown hair, brown eyes. 5'8," 140 lbs.

Advantages: Status, +2 (Captain); Common Sense
Disadvantages: Duty, to Artemis crew (-15 pts)
Skills: Administration-12, Leadership-12

60 points

The Captain has been in his current position for about five years, ever since his predecessor passed away. He takes his job very seriously, and is torn between the need to save his charges on the one hand, and the need to preserve traditions on the other. However, he can be reasoned with, and when push comes to shove he will do what is best for his people, even if it means moving to the surface.

Number One

ST 11, **DX** 14, **IQ** 9, **HT** 7

32 years old, pale complexion, blond hair, blue-green eyes. 6'1," 180 lbs.

Advantages: Status, +1 (Number One)
Disadvantages: Stubbornness
Skills: Administration-9

30 points

Number One is marking his time, waiting for his Captain to pass on so that he can take over as Captain. However, he will not deliberately do anything to hasten his Captain's demise. Still, he thinks that the Captain isn't completely loyal to tradition, and believes that a move to the surface would be a serious mistake.

Afterword

- **Variant scenario:** A player character whose player is present can be the "sacrifice," if one of the players thinks of it. In this case, the player should be taken aside and his situation explained in private, with him doing nothing until he sends his message for help a short time later. The player can then role-play his interactions with the Artemis and its Crew.
- *GURPS Traveller***:** This adventure can be used in a GURPS Traveller setting. In this case, the Artemis misjumped into the Aqualine system. Aqualine itself should be placed just beyond known space, in an area that is currently being explored. Two possible locales are rimward of the Solomani Sphere, or spinward of the Spinward Marches.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

by Jon F. Zeigler

Art by Jesse DeGraff

Producing this article was surprisingly difficult. **GURPS Traveller: Rim of Fire** was a breeze to write. I had no trouble meeting deadlines. Not even the last-minute discovery that we were 15,000 words short disturbed me very much (more about that later). The book required relatively little research and allowed me a lot more room than usual to express creativity. In short, there just weren't very many problems to report after the fact. How does one honestly expand "I had fun writing this book" into 1,000 words or more?

Even so, we did make some deliberate design choices in the course of writing and production, and those choices may provide some insight for **Traveller** fans on how to get the most out of the book. In particular, it might be of interest to see how a book which was originally intended to look very much like **GURPS Traveller: Behind the Claw** ended up being a substantially different work.

History Lessons

The first few chapters of the book describe the history and current situation in Solomani Rim sector. I had two distinct goals here. I needed to recapitulate already-published material for the **GURPS Traveller** audience. At the same time, I wanted to "fill in the blanks," producing new details regarding the Solomani Rim.

For example, Archduke Adair was apparently not mentioned at all in **Classic Traveller** material, and appeared only briefly in **Megatraveller** (a few of his responses to the Rebellion were mentioned, but he was never assigned so much as a first name). Those few references hinted at a determined and tenacious Imperial patriot. He must have had a personal relationship with the Imperial family, considering that he was the only Archduke to give his allegiance to the Emperor Lucan. He must also have had a special tie to the Vegans, given that his campaigns in resistance to the Solomani invasion were based within the Vegan district. That was enough to give me a picture of Kieran Langos Adair: a cunning diplomat with surprising talents as a wartime leader, a personal friend of the Emperor Strephon, and a close ally and patron of the Vegan species. The last item also gave me a new piece of background material, the placement of the Domain of Sol capital on the Vegan homeworld.

There were other examples of this kind of extension. Some study of the regnal dates of various Emperors gave me insight into the politics of the Imperial Court in the years immediately after the Civil War. The result was a slightly deeper picture of the origins of the Solomani Movement than we had seen up to this point. A fortuitous conversation with Hans Rancke-Madsen helped me understand the history of the Old Earth Union and the Bootean League, and also allowed me to hint at the surprising origins of the Sword Worlds colony in the Spinward Marches. Marc Miller's question about an uncaptioned illustration in GDW's **Rebellion Sourcebook** inspired me to develop the character of Elias Treleven, and helped me derive a substantial amount of back story regarding SolSec.

Of course, the biggest block of new material here is the detailed history of the Terran Confederation and the

Interstellar Wars. Much of that material is due to Andrew Moffatt-Vallence, whose superb "Prometheus Rising" material formed the backbone for this section of *Rim of Fire*. Not only was Andrew gracious enough to allow heavy borrowing from his work, he even adjusted a number of items from his draft to fit my vision of how the Interstellar Wars must have proceeded. With any luck, "Prometheus Rising" will itself see print someday, providing *Traveller* players with a rich new setting for play. In the meantime, the material in *Rim of Fire* may be enough to inspire an enterprising GM to create his own Interstellar Wars campaign. I would be pleased to discover that this had happened. The Interstellar Wars period is by far my favorite portion of the *Traveller* "history."

It should be obvious by now that I view any body of canon as a creative challenge. How can one break new ground while still remaining faithful to the canon as established? A big detailed setting such as the Third Imperium is best when it provides plenty of opportunity to create new pieces of back story, building the seeds of single adventures and whole campaigns. Thus, we get the best of both worlds: the support of already-published material, and the range to create a private setting large enough for the entertainment of one's friends.

Four Hundred Worlds

With the background chapters finished, I turned to the description of the Solomani Rim's individual worlds. At first, this section was conceived as resembling the similar material in *Behind the Claw*: a block of textual data and a short paragraph of narrative for each world. It took about three days of work for me to discover that this approach was going to be unsatisfying. By that time I had produced writeups for most of the worlds in Ultima subsector. Many worlds were simply not lending me any inspiration, and I found myself struggling to produce any meaningful narrative for them. Others gave me so much inspiration that I had to deliberately cut myself short, lest the book come in at more than 250 pages.

Designer's Notes: GURPS Traveller: Rim of Fire

Meanwhile, I saw a discussion on *Pyramid* regarding the format of *Behind the Claw*. At least one person expressed dissatisfaction with the world writeups in that book, claiming that they were just long enough to get in the way of his own creativity, but not long enough to provide him with a useful pre-packaged setting. This opinion didn't meet with universal approval (and in fact, I didn't entirely agree with it myself) but it gave me an idea. Why not restrict the long narrative writeups to subsector or other capitals, worlds in strategic locations, or worlds which somehow inspired me to write more? For the rest there would be little or no narrative, simply a block of data not much more extensive than what had been published in the original Solomani Rim material. That way referees could either use my material or set their adventures on worlds I had deliberately left sketchy, as needed. Players could read enough to get a flavor for the sector's worlds, but there would be plenty of areas left open for them to discover.

I polled the *Pyramid* audience, and most people seemed to approve (not all, of course). Loren Wiseman and Steve Jackson both gave their cautious approval. I went ahead. The new format helped a great deal. Now I no longer needed to fight to produce useful narrative for worlds that seemed uninteresting to me. When I came to a world that inspired me, I could go on at some length.

The only serious difficulty was an equivalent of the "data entry" problem. I needed to produce a consistent data block for each of four hundred worlds, cross-checking against all published material and triple-checking for errors. This was complicated by a desire to match the rules systems in *GURPS Traveller: First In*, which were not entirely compatible with earlier Traveller editions. I ended by adjusting many star types and planetary orbits.

I also encountered the perennial problem with *Traveller* world generation: tiny planets with breathable, Earthlike

atmospheres. I had glossed over that problem when writing *First In*, suggesting that referees either use a different procedure or live with the implausibility. In *Rim of Fire* I had no such luxury. As a result, astute readers will notice that many of the smaller worlds of Solomani Rim sector have an average density several times that of solid iron. Fortunately only one of the worlds I felt compelled to describe fit this profile (Hamilcar/Gemini). For that world, I borrowed an idea from an acquaintance of mine, the science-fiction writer Ted White. In one of his stories, he placed our own moon in a plastic membrane to hold in a terraformed atmosphere. I did the same with Hamilcar, only about half seriously . . .

In any case, once I had the basic data for each world, I began to write narratives. Some of these were quite short, marking "captive government" situations or summarizing material that had been published as previous canon. The longer narratives all tended to fall into a similar pattern: first a description of the world's physical environment, then its colonization and early history, then some recent history to explain the world's current social situation, then the details of that current situation. This historical approach seemed to work well, and it fit the orientation toward social and cultural issues that I wanted.

The narratives also have the benefit of providing a framework for the evolution of the sector as a whole. If you're a referee about to develop one of the worlds I left undescribed, then there's almost certainly a detailed world nearby to give you ideas. Neighboring worlds were probably settled at about the same time by the Vilani, they were conquered at the same time by the Terrans, they began to suffer the effects of the Long Night together, they joined the Third Imperium together. Even if their local cultures are very different, they will each interact with interstellar civilization from a similar context.

Incidentally, one item that sometimes provided me with a great deal of inspiration was a world's name. World names sometimes suggested ethnic backgrounds. After all, why would the population of a world cling to a name first assigned by a bored survey officer, thousands of years before? Instead, the official name would be meaningful to the present-day population. Thus Darrukesh became a Vilani world, Hiroshi became Japanese, Esperance became Spanish, Suleiman became Turkish, and so on. Other world names suggested unique features of the planet's environment, such as Easter's egg shape and colorful banding, or Caprice's violent storms. Gwynedd suggested settlement by anachronists (Kathryn Kurtz fans, perhaps). Santorini suggested Minoan culture, so I threw in a reference to a crypto-Minoan civilization I've developed for other fiction.

The Final Draft

Finally, I finished and turned in the first draft for editing and playtest. The playtest went very smoothly, but it also provoked the biggest crisis in the production process. Several playtesters suggested turning the data blocks for the various worlds into tables. This took some work on the part of Gene Seabolt and me, but the end result was very attractive.

The conversion to tables also made the Worlds chapter much more compact, with a great deal of text being reduced to the form of half-page or quarter-page tables. How much more compact? Well, Gene put the tables together, I provided a version of the chapter text with the only change being the removal of data blocks, and we counted pages. We were 15,000 words short, with about two weeks to go before the final draft deadline.

Oddly enough, I wasn't worried. (Gene was!) I went back and added bits and pieces. Each subsector got one more world with full narrative, and I also added a few paragraphs here and there to existing descriptions. Gene and I wrote up four Solomani starship designs. I wrote a few pages of text for the last chapter, detailing the situation of each of several non-human races in the Solomani Rim. All of this took just over a week, and it put us at almost exactly the needed word count.

Another item which was added at the last minute was a set of thumbnail sketches for all ten Imperial dukes, along with several lesser nobles. You'll find this material scattered through the Worlds chapter, and despite its late entry into the draft I believe it's one of the more important elements of the book. The Solomani Rim is characterized by its power politics, so that the adventures of PCs will often be affected by the maneuvers of those at the highest levels. The dukes and counts of the Rim may not often be the direct patrons of PC adventurers. Even so, their machinations will often

affect what adventures are available and what the ultimate rationale of such adventures might be.

Once we were up to the target word count, Gene Seabolt began final production. Meanwhile, he had already gone to freelance artists with the first draft. The results were very fine, with the art pieces for the Worlds chapter in particular matching the text quite closely. Jesse DeGraff's stunning cover was almost finished at that point as well. Of all the books I've written thus far for Steve Jackson Games, I think *Rim of Fire* has turned out to be the most visually impressive.

So, to conclude: "I had fun writing this book." I hope you'll find my vision of the Solomani Rim to be a congenial setting for adventure.

I Wanna Kiss You In Paris

The cold drizzle works its way down your upturned collar as you puzzle out the occult symbols painted in wild graffiti on the side of a dirty, forgotten alleyway in Rome, searching feverishly for a killer's motives hidden there before he takes another child. There are clues written somewhere in the random scrawl on the wall, but you haven't put it all together yet. Around you are the sounds of life: the buzz of scooters with a death wish, the loud burp of buses filled with tourists, the clink of forks on plates as people congregate for lunch in sidewalk cafes and huddled under umbrellas, and two priests discussing the Church in liquid Italian. You look up at the pink, whitewashed buildings, and pray for the one clue that will break this case wide open.

Reality provides endless opportunities for involving storytelling to addict even the most adamant non-gamer. But it's a reality that's over . . . there. It's not out the backdoor or the bedroom window. It's not down the street. It's not even at the mall. It's thousands of miles away in an exotic land full of mysterious people and dark pasts.

Want to hook the players? Want to get your girlfriend or wife past the belief that gaming is just playing around with elves? Just a grain, a dash, or even a dab of the living world can breathe life into even the most burned out gamer's life. Kisses in Paris. Death in Rome. Crossing the Himalayas in search of Buddhist monasteries. Travel! Romance! Unusual cultures! New worlds! Bizarre, nearly inedible food! Peril! Strange college classes being put to good use!

Home is passe'. Time to pack bags and go traveling.

I Dream of Paris

While the players may dream idly of love in Paris and the GM imagines the smell of jasmine on the evening air, most GMs and players lack experience with these mysterious lands. This does present a difficulty. It's not easy to construct a realistic living and breathing culture without knowing anything about the place. Sure, the GM can always "make stuff up," but it's a more satisfying experience for everyone if the culture of the exotic land is reflected in the game play. Players can be free of the their day-to-day mundanities, living exciting adventures and eating strange food with tentacles. (That this brave new world is filled with *someone else's* mundanities is a minor, forgettable detail.

Surprisingly, lack of familiarity with a place isn't a huge problem. Any enterprising GM can dig around and find useful information. There are plenty of resources readily available to the GM and players who want to invest some time in building the world. Most of the information is inexpensive or even free. (Most. Not all. Most.) Better yet, most of the steps involved in getting up to speed are blazingly obvious:

- Visit the place in question. There's nothing like first person perspective to get a handle on a strange place. The wealth of culture absorbed in even a short trip cannot be underestimated, especially if it's someplace weird and inexplicable like Texas. Unfortunately, few gamers are independently wealthy and can travel for the background of a game -- and if they are, they should donate some cash to the rest of us.
- Find someone who lives in the land of choice and pick his or her brains. Ask probing questions about the most obscure details to get a feel for the life and culture of the area. The Internet is a big place, e-mail a powerful tool, and any language barrier can be crossed with a liberal application of the word "what?" and some electronic quasi-gesticulations. Pen pals and chat friends can be invaluable resources for getting a strong grip on the intricacies of a different culture. Several of USENET's **alt.culture** groups are extremely helpful. For example, simply reading the chatter on **alt.culture.egyptian** is enlightening on modern Egyptian life in the bigger cities, especially Cairo, useful for many modern horror games.
- Hit the library and dig up a few biographies and autobiographies written by people in the country and time period of the game. The biographies don't need to be the lives of famous people. More often than not, unless the game is a story of deep political intrigue, the commentary by the common man is more insightful and conveys a better sense of the culture. A well-written biography is almost as good as having been there. For example, the book *Rebels and Redcoats*, a travel documentary of the American Revolution, contains letters and diary entries of both the commanders and the common conscripts, opening a window to the direct impact of the battles on

people living through the war. Biographies written on the life of Michelangelo give not only insight into Renaissance Florence and Rome, but also what it was like to pal around with the rich and famous of the time.

- Lay hands on travel books with pictures and maps. Far too many travel books write dry descriptions of hotels or sights without conveying more in the way of useful information. Pictures really are worth a thousand words, and having a book full of them with commentary on the location is incredibly useful. Look carefully for books which contain first person accounts of walking through famous monuments or toss off comments on surviving the culture. For example, Rick Steves' *Europe Through The Back Door* is nearly useless for traveling but full of atmosphere and vivid descriptions of sights and towns -- a cheap book perfect for a GM with tight budget strings. The *Dorling Kindersley* travel guides are filled with pictures of food, people, and architecture, although they're too heavy to carry for real traveling and on the expensive side.
- Find books on costume and fashion. Not only being fun to look at, books overflowing with world costumes crossing various time periods help to populate worlds that would otherwise be filled with Americans wearing black t-shirts and jeans. They bring the panorama of history alive, and allow GMs to point to pictures and say, "This is what you look like." There are several good ones available: *The Art of Costume: Clothes and Society 1500-1914* by Jane Ashelford and *20,000 Years of Fashion: The History of Costume and Personal Adornment* by Francois Leon Louis Boucher are both fine places to start -- and they make attractive coffee table books.
- Watch documentaries on the Travel, Discovery, and History Channels. Ah, basic cable, the television standard for geeks everywhere. These three channels pack more information per square inch for easy consumption than nearly any other source of popcorn research. They provide shows on everything from the Australian Outback to tribal Indians of Indonesia. The problem is that they rarely consult you, the GM, about what you want to watch and what information you need. Furthermore, not everyone has basic cable. For those who are Discovery Channel disabled, they do have a web site with further pointers to books, documentaries, and research at http://www.discovery.com.

Not everything out there is useful. A good GM can save precious time and money on his or her research knowing up front what to avoid:

- *Fodor's* and *Frommer's* guides for traveling far away. While these travel guides are very useful for finding lodging on a trip and are extremely useful for discovering landmarks in an area the GM already is familiar with, they're next to useless for divining the culture of countries with severely different way of being -- nor do they warn you about pigeons in pigeon-intensive zones. The focus of these books is to provide no-nonsense lists of landmarks, lodging, and restaurants. Written in a dry style with nearly nothing about the culture in question, these highly respected travel guides should be avoided by GMs building games in a world far away, but are very useful for filling in a game in a nearby state or county. The trick to making these books useful is to already have some familiarity with the place. For example, *Fodor's Chicago 2000* is highly useful to someone from the Midwest who wants to build a game with 1920's Mafioso and bootlegging, but may not useful to someone from Spain or France who has never been the US.
- Purchasing travel documentaries on video tape. They rarely live up to their advertised production values. The tapes aren't worth the money. Besides, they take up shelf space that can be filled with nearly anything else: gaming dice, gaming books, gaming miniatures, phone numbers of prospective dates, and assorted nick-knacks. The trick to these things is to go into a travel agency, pretend to be booking a trip, and ask to see their videos for free.
- Web pages. The scanty few, poorly snapped photographs placed in disjoint positions on web pages followed by a little text is worse than useless -- and these are the professionally built pages. Woe be to the poor researching GM who stumbles across someone's vacation photos, for their sanity may not escape intact. While these may be good for looking up the occasional fact, they are rarely helpful in building a coherent game world.
- Gaming Sourcebooks. These books need to be taken on their own individual merits. Before spending the money on a sourcebook, which may equate two travel books or a whole mess of maps, it's best to research them up front. There are several very good sourcebooks on the market, notably many of the *GURPS* world books and some of the *Vampire* city books, but a large number of books that cover locations for GMs might be worth passing up in exchange for a good book on period fashion and a handy guide to the place.

A Dark Land Beckons...

The GM prepares her players, both male and female. She's ready to put together a game full of romantic energy, daring travel, and scathing politics all set against rolling green meadows and an exotic landscape -- not an easy task. Culture and language are taken into account. Books are bought. Costumes are designed. Period weapons are obsessed over.

Even with all the arrayed information in once place, what does a GM and players do with it?

- Flashbacks to an earlier incarnation, life, or *Highlander*-style existence. A long-lived character in any number of superheroesque derivative genres can build real world events into her past and offer them as plot hooks to the GM. "In the late fourteenth century, the Inquisition burned me at the stake here in Campo dei Fiori in Rome as a heretic," says an enterprising demon sitting on his own in a small sidewalk cafe. "Now I'm sitting here eating ice cream. Funny little world, isn't it?"
- Period pieces. A well researched game in feudal Japan is worth its weight in a thousand make-believe, pseudo-Asian sourcebooks, and a full-fledged campaign revolving around the backstabbing politics of the Roman Imperial Senate, complete with conspiracy and bloody gladiatorial games, is priceless. Participating in the full sweep of human history instead of trapped, looking on through history books and dull films, is involving and exhilarating for both players and game master.
- Building a war into a campaign. The gritty realities of human war, from the weaponry to the location of battles to the politics to the sheer cost in human life can be emulated in a roleplaying universe to great effect. Even if the game world is set in an entirely fictional land, the GM can construct a war based entirely on real events in real places. For instance, the climax of a campaign can be set against a great battle between humans and orks, based on the Battle of Waterloo -- complete with the ships, small towns to burn to the ground, flintlock pistols, and a green, hulking, tusked Duke of Wellington.
- Gritty realism. The players can chase down serial killers in the dark, twisting streets of Rome, meet with lovers in the neon lights of Amsterdam, and fight duels to the death in revolutionary Paris. The precise realism allows the GM great latitude to weave plots within plots within plots. For example, wrapping black witchcraft around gritty murders in the dark winding streets of Rome may lead to a conspiracy within the Jesuit community . . . right around the corner at their headquarters . . . all the while capitalizing on the players' frustrations at being unable to order something as simple as a delicious ham sandwich.
- The threads of conspiracy. Like *Foucault's Pendulum* or *The Club Dumas*, the threads of a dark conspiracy can lace from one country to another, jumping through time periods, weaving back and forth across cultures and exotic locations to land in the present day. Through the burning embers of the Crusades to the Prague of Dr. John Dee to the modern day secret archives of the Vatican, history itself coughs up dozens of situations and personalities to twine into an endless loop of plot. Building clues into the architecture and position of the buildings is just part of the thrill. The GM can send characters to scrounge through the ashes of history, looking for one clue that gives them endless riches or turns one of them into the Antichrist. (Like most other things, becoming the Antichrist in a conspiracy campaign is often one of those things that "just happens.")

The Author's Exciting Flights of Fancy

On a personal note, if you want to "hook the women," as it were, a combination of the romance of far away and the feel of a world far away yet very real is a winner. After standing in the Doge's Palace in Venice, surrounded by the barely remembered rasps of velvet robes dragging on the floor and faint memories of vast political conspiracies and plays for power, my mind danced with ideas and concepts for campaigns. Coupled with the armory full of Renaissance-era weaponry it was a gold mine! The pulse of what could have been together with being in the center of a powerful city-state started me thinking about running games again. (And thinking about that OGL license . . . but that's another story.)

It's easier to grasp the real world. There's more stuff to play with. While there might be elves out there somewhere, it is more engaging to believe, for instance, that *things* live in dark corners of the tube stations of the London Underground. Underground maps (for what they're worth) are readily available in little "pocket guides to London" for far less than a gaming sourcebook, and they're built to take a beating.

Next time, when trying to hook a new player or trying to get a group of jaded gamers excited again, leave the *Glorantha* on the shelves, next to *Forgotten Realms* and the infinite worlds of *Shadow*. Start flicking through battered travel books on the bookshelves (the ones with the dust on them) and start thinking about the world we live in. It's big and wacky and worth gaming.

Pyramid Review

Core (for Shards of the Stone RPG)

Published by [Obsidian Studios](#)

Written by Sean Patrick Fannon

382 pages; $25.00

With all of the attention this summer on *D&D 3rd Edition* it would be hard to imagine that another game company would have the nerve to release another fantasy game in the same genre at the same time. Yet, this is exactly what Obsidian Studios has done with its new flagship release,*Shards of the Stone*. The game is a bold new take on the traditional fantasy setting, and the timing of its release says a lot about the confidence of its publishers.

The first book to be released is *Core*, which serves as an introduction to the game world and a primary source book for all the major rules and common material of the game. It contains the basic rules, an introduction to Core (the main game world) and how it came to be, character creation rules and material, a bestiary, and general material for the GM.

One of the most interesting aspects of *Shards* that will be most immediately apparent is the unique setting in which the game takes place. The basic premise of the game is as follows: Long ago, all that existed in the world of Core was the Stone. This mythical stone contained all that was life, and everything within it existed in a more or less utopian state. Then along come the Progeny, the god-like manifestations of the twenty-five prime elements, who are given the Stone to do with it what they will.

Before long, they start bickering and fighting, and the Stone is sundered into innumerable fragments. From the shards of this stone sprung countless worlds, each as diverse as could be. Mankind (and its humanoid kin) are thrust into these realms to fend for themselves, and the Progeny fade into the background to become deific manipulators and schemers. Enter into this world infinite magic and countless monsters, and you have a combination for loads and loads of fantasy.

At least as far as *Core* is concerned, *Shards of the Stone* follows along many of the primary lines of traditional fantasy. The playable races include things like elves, dwarves, and orcs, and much of the material presented is standard fantasy fare (swords, sorcery, etc.). This is rather limiting, but *Shards* has taken a fairly unique approach to it. Additionally, it promises to round out and make the game even more unique with the numerous realm books which will be forthcoming.

One of the major themes of the game is the twenty-five elements that make up the world of Core. Twenty-five may seem like a high number, but the elements include a lot more than just earth, air, fire, and water. They also include things like light, darkness, truth, deception, matter, energy, chaos, order, time, and many others. All of these elements have been very closely integrated into the game, something that makes *Shards* rather unique. The elements are the primal energies that make up the world and all that's in it. Different realms will have an abundance of some and a lack of others, a feature that greatly influences just what kind of realm it is. Furthermore, different races even have their own sympathies and antipathies with certain elements. These elements are also very closely tied with magic, making up the primal forces with which magic is cast.

Shards uses the Fuzion rules as its primary die system. Fuzion was developed by the Fuzion Lab Group as a system to

be used with ***Champions: New Millennium***, but that would be open to other publishers that wish to use it. Many of you will notice that Wizards of the Coast has caught onto the effectiveness of this strategy with the open-source gaming that is to be done with its own d20 system. For those of you not familiar with Fuzion, its basics are as such: You roll a 3d6, add your action value (skill level), and compare it to a target number. The difference between what you roll and the target number determines the level of success or failure. Overall, Fuzion is very simple, although it can get somewhat rule-heavy. ***Shards*** pushes this even further, by tweaking it with many of its own rules. The one convenient thing is that Fuzion is very flexible, and if you don't like something, you can often just toss it and everything will be just fine.

As the book is written, it is geared somewhat towards beginners (another factor that implies the publisher's intention of competing with ***D&D***), although experienced gamers will have no trouble making use of it. The hero creation system is pretty detailed, and there's a lot of room for playing characters of all types. The game is skill based, tossing classes out the window, and make the players choose their vocation based entirely on their skills. Even magic-users must buy their spell-casting abilities as skills, although they are rather expensive. There are a wide array of talents, benefits, and complications (i.e. character drawbacks; why exactly they choose to call them complications, I simply don't know), with which players may fully round out their characters.

The combat system is made to be either smooth or complicated, whichever the game master prefers. Players can purchase fighting styles (either as packages or one skill at a time), which allow them to do all kinds of interesting maneuvers and procedures. Furthermore, the combat system has a thorough list of basic and advanced combat maneuvers, listing what they are, how they are played (rule-wise, that is), and what effect they have. This seems clunky at first, but actually makes a pretty handy quick-reference. The rest of the combat rules are for the most part pretty thorough, covering almost every situation the players may expect to find themselves in.

One of the game's highlights is its magic system. The take here is a very different one, which is in some ways simple and in others complicated. All magic in ***Shards*** is tied directly to the twenty-five elements. Any time a spell is cast, a piece of elemental essence is used up. Furthermore, those racial sympathies and antipathies with the different elements come heavily into play when casting spells. So, for example, a race that is sympathetic towards the water element has a true advantage when casting water spells.

The spells don't really have any sort of level in the traditional sense, though they can be cast at different levels of intensity. For the most part, this just means you get more at higher levels of whatever you get at the base level (more damage, more protection, etc.). The spells are all very basic, and they are presented all in more or less identical manners for each of the forms (which are described below). While some gamers may like this simple approach, others may be upset that the spells lose a little bit of their mystic luster when presented on such a basic level.

The spells are broken up into three different types, or forms as they are called, and then into various styles. The different forms are adeptry (magic that is drawn from the inner self), channeling (magic that is drawn from other beings), and practicioning (magic that uses formulas and a somewhat scientific understanding of the elements). These are then broken down into different styles, six of which (two for each form) are given in the main book. They are sorcery, wizardry, druidry, invocation, mindwalking, and psionics.

A system is also provided for creating new spells and styles. It is very detailed and somewhat simple to use; however, its focus seems to be more on tweaking and customizing existing spells and styles than creating entirely new ones. There are a whole bunch of "half-written" spells given that are ready to be customized for use as the player or GM sees fit.

There's a whole chapter devoted to game mastering. It consists mostly of advice for GMs on how to run a game, and much of the material is lifted straight from the ***Fantasy Roleplaying Gamer's Bible 2nd Ed.*** (also published by Obsidian Studios). The advice is all good, but most of it is stuff that experienced GMs will have heard before. Also, a system is given in this chapter for deriving quick stats for NPCs and the like.

And what core rule book would be complete without a chapter on monsters? There are plenty provided here, each with lots of potential not just for gruesome combat, but for plot development as well. There is also a system here for developing one's own monsters and races.

One of the major themes that the writers are pushing in this game is player involvement, not just in game play, but in the writing process as well. If you look closely, you will see that www.shardsofthestone.com appears on virtually every page of the book, including the cover. That's because they want you to go to the site and submit stuff. Obsidian plans on getting players involved in game production as closely as possible through the website. If it all works out well, then this could become a very exciting aspect of the game indeed.

Of course, there are a few snags to be found. The first is that, although *Shards* takes a very original spin on things, it *is* still a traditional fantasy game (at least as far as what's presented in *Core* is concerned), so it doesn't have much to offer those looking for something a little more different. Also, the rules do tend to get a little heavy at times. This is definitely not a quick pick-up game. Players and GMs will need to spend a little bit of time getting all of these rules down before things will move quickly. Of course, if you are already familiar with Fuzion, then this shouldn't take too long.

Lastly, I really hate to pick on games for typographical and layout problems, but this one has a few that are a real pain. There are a lot of little layout mistakes and typos, most of which are simply inane but annoying. The real problem was with some of the section headings within the chapters. They are printed somewhat small and often times not in bold, making it hard to find things fast.

Of course, to be fair we must mention the incredible artwork found throughout the book, which throws the mistakes into check. All of the art is done by Obsidian Studios' own JAE, who is truly very talented. Furthermore, the game is printed on a yellow, parchment-style paper stock, which makes the book stand out a bit from the others and gives it a subtly different visual feel.

Overall, this game is great. There is a lot to chew through, but the high amount of potential this game provides and the original take on a fantasy setting it gives makes it well worth the effort. If all goes well, then *D&D 3E* may truly have met some worthy competition.

-- Jon Thompson

Pyramid Pick

Star Crusade 2: Lost Worlds (for Fading Suns RPG)

By Bill Bridges, et al.

Published by [Holistic Design Inc.](#)

120 pages, $20.00

Science fiction roleplaying has always labored under two conflicting desires:
realism and playability. The desire for realism is easy to understand. Science
fiction, as its name suggests, is about science, which in the minds of many is
tantamount to saying "the truth." Consequently, SF fans expect their favorite authors (or game designers) to create rich
and detailed worlds, all of them in accordance with the Laws of [Insert Pertinent Scientific Discipline Here].

Unfortunately, science is a double-edged sword, for it also tells us that faster-than-light travel is, if not impossible,
highly improbable. Not surprisingly, this fact (and others like it) runs afoul of the desire for playability. While many
excellent gaming environments could be constructed without the need for FTL travel, they'll always seem a little pale
in the minds of most science fiction gamers, who dream of star-spanning empires and myriad alien races.

Thus, the designers of science fiction roleplaying games must make a decision: how far will they sacrifice one of these
two desires to accommodate the other? In the case of Holistic Design's *Fading Suns*, it's quite clear the designers
chose rollicking playability over scientific verisimilitude and with good reason. Four years after it's release, *Fading
Suns* remains a game that demands to be played, not just read. This is especially evident in *Star Crusade 2: Lost
Worlds*, a companion volume to the recent *Star Crusade* sourcebook.

Drawing inspiration from the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Jack Vance, and sci-fi from the Golden Age, *Lost
Worlds* describes sixteen worlds previously unknown to the inhabitants of the *Fading Suns* setting. With the opening
of the jumpweb to these planets, the careful balance of power between the emperor, noble houses, Church, and
merchants of the Known Worlds could be in jeopardy. Consequently, *Lost Worlds* is, first and foremost, a book of
adventure locales and ideas to add spice to any *Fading Suns* campaign. In that respect, it succeeds admirably.

Each of the book's sixteen worlds is unique, offering a wealth of adventuring opportunities. They range from the water
world of Epiphany to the psychic civilization of Kun Lun to the war torn gangland of Twilight - and many more. Each
world gets a six-page treatment, detailing its history, geography, current conditions, people, and culture. Each world
likewise gets a nice world map in the style of the excellent Imperial Survey volumes, along with a representative NPC.

All in all, the approach taken to these lost worlds is a solid one. Each planet receives a significant enough treatment so
as to be useful to a Game Master without binding his hands overly much with needless details. Indeed, *Lost Worlds*
continues the fine tradition begun in other *Fading Suns* products of presenting a dynamic setting unhampered by
metaplot. Thus a GM will have no difficulty using as much or as little of the information presented in this supplement
without concern about its either upsetting his own campaign or locking him in to future developments he may not
wish. That's a difficult feat to pull off, and the folks at Holistic Design should be congratulated for having done so.

Lost Worlds also include eight pages devoted to four new alien races. These included the hyper-intelligent, genetically
engineered Qabirim, the silicon-based Ming, the fungal Muazi, and the incorporeal Z'go. In general, I was less
impressed with the alien races than I was with the lost worlds themselves. While the Qabirim add another piece to the
puzzle of humanity's tinkering with its own genetics and the Muazi represent an unusual take on sentience, I didn't find
the Ming or the Z'go nearly as compelling. Even given the Introduction's paean to "the stuff of good ol' pulp sci-fi

adventure," I wasn't taken in by the living rock Ming, never mind the sentient energy beings that are the Z'go.

Physically, *Lost Worlds* is as good as any recent *Fading Suns* book. The art throughout is decent, although I missed the *John Bridges* art that usually graces the beginning of each chapter (since *Lost Worlds* has no clear chapter divisions). I especially liked the artwork of Mitch Byrd, who has done a great deal of work on White Wolf's *Hunter: The Reckoning* line. Sadly, the book's cover, by Brian LeBlanc, isn't as good as many recent offerings (or LeBlanc's interior work), but that's a minor quibble. I'm also pleased to note that editing has improved considerably. I noticed no obvious typos in the book, which is quite an accomplishment, given the poor editing in past volumes.

What truly impressed me about *Lost Worlds* is the sheer number of honest-to-goodness usable ideas within its 120 pages. This is a book that's meant to be used. Reading through it, I bemoaned the fact that my *Fading Suns* campaign died several months ago. For me, that's a pretty high recommendation. Any book that can make me regret that I no longer run the game for which it is a supplement is a good one.

This isn't to say the book is flawless; it isn't. Yet, it is a good example of the sorts of supplements of which I'd like to see more: collections of locales, personalities, and situations that eliminate some of a game's drudge work while still leaving the GM firmly in command of his campaign's direction. Other game companies would do well to take note of this and emulate it, since it's a sure way to get my gaming dollar.

-- *James Maliszewski*

Pyramid Review

Legend of the Five Rings Diskwars --
Imperial Edition

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Designed by Raymond Lau

Boxed set with 8 sheets of disks and one rules sheet;
$9.95

The world of Rokugan depicted in the various incarnations of *Legend of the Five Rings* is an interesting one that takes the tropes of western fantasy and applies them to a medieval Japan-like empire with some Chinese mythology and history thrown in for kicks. Originally a collectable card game, it has spread out into a miniatures game (*Clan War*), a roleplaying game, and now . . . *Diskwars*.

I liked the idea of *Diskwars* -- miniatures wargaming without needing my own weight in lead figures -- but the setting of the original set was too generic for my taste, so I passed on it. The addition of the well-developed setting of the Rokugani Empire made it look much more promising. The time of this game is about the same time as the CCG's *Imperial Edition* on the *L5R* timeline.

For your ten bucks, you get a set of cardboard sheets ("flats") and a rulesheet of unwieldy proportions. There are six different sets, one for each of the original six Great Clans of Rokugan. The two I happened to purchase were Phoenix, who are the masters of the five-element magic practiced in the Empire, and the Dragon, a clan of mystical tattooed warriors. One of the sheets in each box has your clan's Stronghold, which is a large disk used both as a staging area and as a goal in some scenarios, and is equivalent to the land disks in the original game. Another sheet is a components sheet with counters, with the other six being a mixture of fixed clan-specific disks and random sheets of units.

Gameplay is almost exactly like the original *Diskwars*, in that you move your unit-disks by flipping them; when one of your disks overlaps or is overlapped by an enemy disk, they fight it out *Magic: The Gathering*-style. Unlike the original land disks, your stronghold has a special ability relevant to your clan. I've been told later editions of Diskwars include these as well, but for *L5R* it is very appropriate given that the idea of a "stronghold" helped set its CCG version apart from the flood of *Magic*-clones when it was released. Most of the abilities and spells are the same as those found in *Diskwars*, but renamed and reorganized to fit Rokugan. The "Swashbuckler" ability is replaced by "Dai-sho," for example, and the spells are divided into the five elemental rings of Fire, Water, Earth, Air, and Void.

The most important alterations, however, is the addition of Item disks and dueling. Item disks are given to one of your units at the beginning of battle. Every box comes with at least one Item, which is that clan's Ancestral Sword. Items have various effects on the disk that possesses them. Dueling, on the other hand, is a new mechanic that involves challenging an enemy disk through one of several methods, then flipping "duel counters" onto the table. Each duel counter has a "Focus" side and a "Strike" side, that do two and four damage, respectively. By landing the counters on the opponent disk, you deal the damage shown. Mechanically it feels nothing like the card game, but strategically it serves the same purpose of allowing a disk that is spiritually strong but weak in battle to effectively combat a more

powerful disk.

L5R Diskwars makes for an enjoyable game, with more than a few strategic twists. It also seems to be better balanced than either the original *Diskwars* or the *L5R CCG* -- none of the biases present in the *CCG* are exhibited here. The game has a lot of problems, even so. The rulesheet is badly edited, with several annoying omissions and spots where the search-and-replace of *Diskwars* terms for *L5R* ones failed. Several abilities and spells are under the correct heading, but referred to by the *Diskwars* name in the main text. While a [FAQ](#) with corrections is at [www.alderac.com](#), and a revised downloadable rulebook is forthcoming, AEG has had similar editing slips before and it is disappointing to see them yet again.

For a fan of *Legend of the Five Rings* or *Diskwars*, this is certainly worth a look. For devotees of wargames in general, *L5R Diskwars* is just as good as the original and may be more satisfying if you enjoy well-developed worlds and can overlook the rulebook flaws. AEG has plans to release expansions based on the CCG expansions, so combined with the quality of the game itself, *L5R Diskwars* may be around for a while.

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-- Damien Wellman

Columns

As you can see by this week's Pyramid Poll, the topic of magazine columns has been on my mind recently. Given the conclusion of John Wick's column, I've received many ideas, requests, and offers for new columns . . . as well as many requests *not* to start any new columns. I'm of several minds on the subject, and, in the interests of honesty and communication, I think it's only fair to let you know where I stand.

See, I personally like columns; when they're done well, they're something I look (or looked) forward to each month (or week, or whatever). Penn Jillette's columns [from *PC Computing*](), Peter David's "But I Digress" from *Comic Buyer's Guide*, Harlan Ellison's "Watching" from *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*, "Cheers & Jeers" from *TV Guide* . . . I love them all. And I continued reading *PC Computing* long after my 486-33 was an outdated lump of computing sand, simply because I enjoyed Jillette's columns so much.

This continuity is one of the reasons to have columns. Continuity is difficult to achieve in publications (which I've always considered *Pyramid* to be); it's one thing to produce a quality product every month (or week, or whatever), it's another to have a reader come back each month to enjoy that continuity. Although I don't have quite as much pressure to keep you all picking us up off the newsstand each week, I *do* have a pressure of sorts to have you resubscribe at the end of the year. If, at the end of that year, you remember the mag as being a pleasant read, but it doesn't stir any other emotions in you, then you may not resubscribe; you may forget, you may spend that $15 on Hot Wheels, or something similar. But if you remember the mag as the keeper of that one column/feature/comic/whatever that you love each month, the odds seem higher for you to resubscribe.

Columns are also nice because of audience and consistency of product. I've said it before on the newsgroups, but it bears repeating here: As I see it, the purpose of most columns is to appeal to more people and be better received than a random article that would take its place. Thus while not everyone might have a use for an article about how to combine the **Pokémon CCG** with the **Vampire CCG** ("I choose you, Nosferatu!") -- even if it's the best darn **Poképire** article ever -- hopefully more people will be able to use a generically written article about, say, creating a campaign world. Columns are, almost by nature, pretty accessible; they tend not to be game specific, and hopefully provide a lot of readers *something* interesting to read each week even if they don't like the **GURPS** house rules article, the **Settlers of Caitan** variant, or the **Torg** adventure.

A hypothetical recurring campaign-world-creation column (or whatever) is also going to be of a more consistent quality and voice than random campaign-world-creation articles that might take its place. It will also have the advantage of being able to build upon itself and refer to previous installments (like Ken Hite masterfully does in "Suppressed Transmission"), resulting in a richer whole. (These advantages are negated by a couple of the ideas mentioned in the poll, like the historical information column.)

Of course, columns aren't all milk & honey. If you *don't* like a column, then instead of having one piece a month you'll automatically like, you'll have one piece a month you'll automatically *dis*like. And it's possible to have too many columns, resulting in a magazine that feels like nothing *but* columns.

Columns are generic and accessible by nature; this genericness can be a disadvantage, though, if you don't need what the column is offering. This hypothetical recurring campaign-world-creation column is going to be useless if you can create a dozen campaigns before breakfast, but *really* need more specific real-world information or house rules.

Columns also mean fewer slots for other writers or would-be writers to fill; for the aspiring writer this can seem unfair, and can adversely affect the diversity of the magazine . . . fewer voices means fewer choices.

So since I've always been about communication, I invite you folks who wish to have a say in the column decision-making process to join me over in the newly-created **sjgames.pyramid.newcolumn** over in the [discussion groups](). I expect this board to stick around for the next few weeks or so before I make any kind of permanent decision. I hope the lack of 2,500 messages in this new board will encourage folks who might otherwise be intimidated by the "regular" *Pyramid* discussion board. We'll see.

(Of course, I'll always read e-mail you send me, about this or any other topic. But isn't it more fun to be part of a big, wacky gaming community?)

* * *

I confess to suffering a fair amount of technolust, that tendency to "need" the latest gadgets, gizmos, and widgets. Fortunately I'm what we call in the biz "poor," so I can't succumb to it very often. (It's also the reason my computer DVD player is hooked up to my 1984 swivel-based television, which weighs more than Io.)

Nevertheless, I've been sorely tempted by the latest batch of MP3 CD-ROM/CD players. The ability to play a CD-Rom of a couple hundred songs for a gaming session in a compact unit seems *awfully* tempting. If anyone has any personal experience regarding these, I'd love to hear it . . . either via e-mail or mayhaps over in **sjgames.chatter**. Or if you're feeling particularly ambitious, you may want to make an inquiry to write a review about it.

(And if anyone wants to be the guinea pig, feel free to check out http://hardware.mp3.com/hardware/.)

-- Steven Marsh
    (Hoping not to get blown away by a hurricane.)

* * *

Last week's answer: **IST Kingston** (for **GURPS Supers**), p. 3.

(four stars) "One thing one has to remember when role-playing a villain is exactly what type of villain is being played. Basically, there are two types of villain: those who say *'Bah!'* and those who don't say *'Bah!'* "

The Influencing Engine

"[T]he said Patient has declared . . . that there had long been and was then an immense Machine under ground near the Hospital under the management of powerful and evil agents . . . by means of which Machine the said Matthews was acted upon . . . and that many other persons were likewise under such malignant influence . . ."
-- deposition of Dr. John Haslam, apothecary of Bedlam, Dec. 1, 1809

It's a mind control conspiracy for the Nineties -- the 1790s, that is. If our modern MK-ULTRA is based on stolen Tesla technology, this misappropriation of Mesmer must have been MK-INFRA. It's not so much [HAARP](#) as it is HAARPsichord. Welcome to the dingy basement of psychiatry and conspiracy theory, to the mysterious apparatus of the Air-Loom, the Influencing Engine.

James Tilly Matthews, a London tea-broker mixed up in radical politics, revealed the Engine's existence to us. An associate of the Quaker David Williams, Matthews went with Williams to France after the outbreak of the Revolution to admire the Cult of Reason and to support the cause of Liberty. Which is why, of course, the Jacobins arrested him as a spy in 1793 when they took over the government; after two years of maltreatment, they released him in early 1796. Matthews returned to England and began demanding recompense for his injuries from Lord Liverpool, the secretary of trade and a privy councilor to King George III. When that worthy declined to meet him, Matthews became threatening and disrupted a session of Parliament, accusing the ministry of "traitorous venality." The Privy Council remanded him to Bethlehem (Bedlam) Hospital as a madman on January 28, 1797, over the protests of his family and parish.

"As boys raise a kite in the air, so these wretches, by means of the air-loom and magnetic impregnations, contrive to lift into the brain some particular idea, which floats and undulates in the intellect for hours together; and how much soever the person assailed may wish to direct his mind to other objects, and banish the idea forced upon him, he finds himself unable; as the idea which they have kited keeps waving in his mind, and fixes his attention to the exclusion of other thoughts."
-- John Haslam, *Illustrations of Madness* (1810)

In Bedlam, Matthews continued to protest against Lord Liverpool's conspiracy, but soon redirected his complaints to a more immediate threat. A "gang of villains profoundly skilled in Pneumatic Chemistry," working from an underground refuge near London's Wall, operated an infernal device -- the deadly Air-Loom -- to drive Matthews insane and torture him into acceding to the Pneumatic Chemists' plans. The Air-Loom (which Matthews illustrated with technical drawings) contains a number of barrels reminiscent of mesmeric "baquet" tubs used by French doctors, a "harmonica" style electrical battery, a windmill or whirligig, and a brass pipe; all controlled by seven Pneumatic Chemists using an array of busbars, pedals, levers, and "piano-forte keys." By electrically activating various gases, the Air-Loom weaves the "magnetic fluid" into "wires" reaching invisibly out to their victims. The Air-Loom can be used to plant or transmit thoughts, read minds, forcibly distort ideology (by "lengthening the brain"), "cut soul from sense," create dreams (by using "puppets of uncouth shape"), and by squeezing the victim in the magnetic fluid, can distend the body with gas, or cause laughter, spontaneous bowel release, bladder stones, lockjaw, apoplexy, and even death. Fortunately its range seems limited to around a thousand feet, but other gangs had other sympathetic Air-Looms planted near "the Houses of Parliament, the Admiralty, Treasury, & c." John Haslam, apothecary of Bedlam, faithfully transcribed all these (and many other) technical details in his pamphlet *Illustrations of Madness,* which he used to defend his judgement that Matthews was, in fact, insane.

"After having by every possible means counteracted me in the effort to save Louis [XVI]; by means of those infamous Men of France, who forming a Corresponding Committee of the Convention; were in connexion with the Secret Cabinet in the Court of St. James's, of which you have been the Prime Mover, you did actually affect the murder of that unfortunate Monarch . . ."
-- letter from James Tilly Matthews to Lord Liverpool, Dec. 6, 1796

One reason Haslam wanted to keep Matthews locked away was because the inhuman conditions at Bedlam, if revealed, could cost the apothecary his position -- as indeed they did in 1816, the year after Matthews' death. Another reason

was the very strong hint by his lordship of Liverpool that Matthews should die in the asylum rather than continue to threaten the government. Matthews, of course, knew that Lord Liverpool was the front man for the Pneumatic Chemists, in their conspiracy to put the Duke of York (the corrupt and incompetent second son of George III) on the throne of France, marry French royalty into the English line, and use the confusion to loot the treasuries of both countries. Matthews accused Liverpool of stealing the French crown jewels (and the diamonds of Marie Antoinette) to further that dastardly goal.

Matthews took such chicanery personally, because by around 1800 he had realized that he was, in fact, the "Omni Imperious Arch-Grand-Arch-Emperor Supreme" of the world, based on his putative descent from King Edward III. (Was an Air-Loom activated near [Joshua Norton](#) for some hidden purpose sixty years later?) Matthews added the college of heralds to those in the conspiracy against him, accusing them of obscuring his bloodline (leading to the inevitable speculation about a Prieuré de Sion power struggle). Matthews does mention that certain of the Pneumatic Chemists told him he was "Buonaparte's talisman," and that somehow his degradation drove the Emperor to further heights. In this context, it's interesting to note that Napoleon's defeat parallels Matthews' eventual removal from Bedlam into a more salubrious asylum at Hackney -- out of range, perhaps, of the Air-Loom. Bedlam itself didn't survive Matthews, as the hospital moved into a new building (now the Imperial War Museum) in 1815. Matthews even submitted a design for the new Bedlam Hospital, which has been annoyingly (if conveniently for Them) lost.

"[T]he miraculous apparitions, ecstasies, and inexplicable visions which are the source of so much error and absurd belief [are] magnetic attacks. One feels how greatly the very obscurity which has shrouded such phenomena, when combined with the ignorance of the multitude, must have fostered the growth of the religious and political prejudices of all peoples."
-- Franz Anton Mesmer, *Memoire Upon The Discovery of Animal Magnetism* (1779)

The Pneumatic Chemists had advanced their plans, meanwhile, to "event-working," a "science formerly supposed to depend on certain positions of the planetary system." And they weren't the only ones. As it turns out in Real History, Franz Anton Mesmer (born, for you Discordian fans, on 5/23 in 1734) was intimately involved in, at the very least, anti-monarchist activities while in Paris between 1778 and 1789. Mesmer's fortunes declined in 1784 after a panel of the French Academy of Sciences (including the chemist Lavoisier, the astronomer Bailly, the surgeon Guillotin -- and Benjamin Franklin, inventor of the harmonica used in the Air-Loom) investigated his student Charles d'Eslon and pronounced mesmerism nothing more than delusion and inappropriate massage. Mesmer, not discouraged, snaked a pension out of the French royal family with an oddly threatening letter and founded a Masonic order along with the radical Brissot and the Marquis de Lafayette. (Matthews feared that an Air-Loom had caused George Washington to resign the Presidency in 1796; Lafayette sailed to America in 1785 to share "Mesmer's secret" with his adored General.) Given that both Mesmer and Franklin were Masons, it almost looks like the whole panel was trying to save everyone's face and avoid an open breach. Mesmer eventually left France after his pupil Brissot (and another doctor experimenting in "animal magnetism," Jean-Paul Marat) launched the Revolution his "Brothers of Light" had hinted that mesmerism made inevitable. Another Brother, Jean-Louis Carra, had explicitly tied mesmerism to revolution, arguing that the poor weather plaguing France was caused by the inherent magnetic imbalances of a monarchy.

"Get acquainted with the science of spiritology. You will get much sense from that."
-- Charles J. Guiteau, assassin of President James A. Garfield (1881)

Which is why, mayhap, Lord Liverpool was so concerned about letting mesmeric maniacs run loose around London. Matthews' testimony accuses the Pneumatic Chemists of orchestrating the attempted assassination of King George III by the deranged soldier James Hadfield in 1800; their Air-Looms may also have been what began to drive poor George mad in 1788, and finished the job in 1811. Another "deranged assassin," John Bellingham, shot and killed Prime Minister Spencer Perceval in 1812, after an unjust imprisonment (in Russia) and baseless accusations (of embezzlement) had ruined Bellingham's life. Somewhat off-beam, any discussion of mind-controlled (or delusional) assassins points us toward not only Sirhan Sirhan and Charles Guiteau, but Ramon Mercader (who killed Trotsky) and Mark David Chapman. The parallels between Bellingham and Matthews bring to mind the alleged "second Oswald," ready to go if the first patsy dropped out; could Matthews have been Bellingham's backup, ready to "escape" if Perceval somehow survived? (In his murky Eco-manque novel *The Influencing Engine,* Richard Hayden gives a wonderfully twisty explanation tying Matthews and Bellingham together with the radical "Cato Street conspiracy,"

which nearly blew up the Cabinet in 1820.)

Taking yet another step into fantasy, Matthews called Liverpool's circle "Vampiring Consequentials" and in one of his "Imperial" decrees, ordered them hung and then beheaded or burned "to assure that they are Dead to be proved." Could Matthews have stumbled upon an actual vampire conspiracy? Could some vampiric Newton or Watt, seeking to mechanically extend his natural domination (perhaps over other vampires, eventually), have developed the Air-Loom to those ends? The Pneumatic Chemists seem an inhuman lot in Matthews' testimony, including a transvestite androgyne ("Sir Archy"), the never-smiling ringleader who eerily resembled dead statesman Sir William Pultney (significantly called "King Bill"), and a mysterious "Glove-Woman" who has "never been known to speak." Possibly some other supernatural explanation is in order; the gases and effluvia used in the Air-Loom include not only the alchemical copper, sulfur, aquafortis, and roses (and the witchly hellebore, nightshade, and "seminal fluid") but "Egyptian snuff" explicitly for "dream wanderings" at the mouth of the Nile. Of course, the Air-Loom might just be a steampunk not-yet-orbital mind-control laser (using gas to focus an energy "wire" sound familiar?), or you could emphasize its farcical elements for an intriguing, tongue-in-cheek *GURPS Goblins* scenario.

Whether its warp runs back to the ropes of the Gordian Knot (enigmatic symbol of imperial rule) or forward to the puppet-strings on John Hinckley, you can weave your campaign's design into the invisible etheric tapestry of the Air Loom. If they listen at the sewer-gratings of history, and place their ears to the madhouse doors of culture, perhaps your players can hear the mutterings of magical conspiracy amid the clacking whir of the Influencing Engine.

?

by Mike Mayer

There are two kinds of people in the world -- those who win at ***Ricochet Robot*** and those who hate it. If you're one of the winners, good for you, you have mastered a skill that will certainly come in handy when you . . . when you . . . um, well, you have mastered a skill. But if you're one of the people who can't seem to wrap his mind around how the game is supposed to work, that's all right, we can help.

Step 1: Count like a Robot.

Count 1, 2, 3, 4 . . .. Do it again. Not much fun is it? And it takes a lot of time. To save precious seconds when planning your routes, try counting the ricochets in units. Any U-Turn a robot takes needs three movements. Remember this. Drill it into your head. So when taking a robot along U-Turn, instead of counting each movement, simply glance at the board and add three. The same principal works for a zigzag motion. A zigzag takes three movements as well. A route that takes the robot along a square pattern takes four. And an "L" shape takes two. These are the basic movements in the game. If you remember their values and practice this sort of "flash" adding, you'll come out way ahead on the time front.

Step 2: Be as Decisive as a Robot.

As you map out the active robot's movement, if the number of ricochets reaches seven, and the active robot is still nowhere near the target space, switch to another route. Don't waste time with a bum path. The logic is this: if it takes more than seven movements to bring the active robot near the target space, you'll probably lose the round, as that number will most likely be added with an even greater number -- the number of movements it will take to put an obstacle robot into position (see below). And surely your opponents will be able to come up with a lower bid than that.

Step 3: Think Like a Robot.

For the active robot to reach its target space, it will often need to ricochet off at least one other robot acting as an obstacle. Many players find it easiest to figure out exactly where the obstacle robot must be placed before figuring out how to move any other robots.

Imagine that the obstacle robot is already sitting where it needs to be, and then count how many movements are required for the active robot to reach its goal as if the obstacle robot was already in place. In the above example, if the obstacle robot was already in place, it would take the red robot three movements to reach its goal. Keep

Ricochet Robot Examples

this number in mind. When you find a route that puts an obstacle robot where it needs to be, add the number of movements the obstacle robot needs to take with the remembered number. The total is your bid.

Where do you put the obstacle robot?

If the obstacle robot's placement isn't immediately obvious, follow this rule of thumb: If the target space is located two or three squares from the border of the game board, the obstacle robot will be placed along one of the two borders that are nearest the target space, either wedged in the corner of the game board or wedged between a border and a wall extending perpendicular from the border.

A few of target spaces are exceptions to this rule, such as the one of the green circles and one of the blue triangles. And a few other target spaces will give you trouble depending on how the boards are arranged. In these cases, you'll sometimes have to look elsewhere completely.

Things are often more difficult if the target space is located four or more spaces from a border. In this event, first search the borders across the board from the target space for a place to put the obstacle robot (as long as the target space allows the active robot to enter it from that direction, of course). If an obvious place can't be found, you'll have to do some searching.

But which robot should serve as the obstacle robot? If the choice is not immediately obvious, search for possible obstacle robots in this order:

Example #1: For the red robot to reach the red hexagon, and obstacle robot will be needed here.
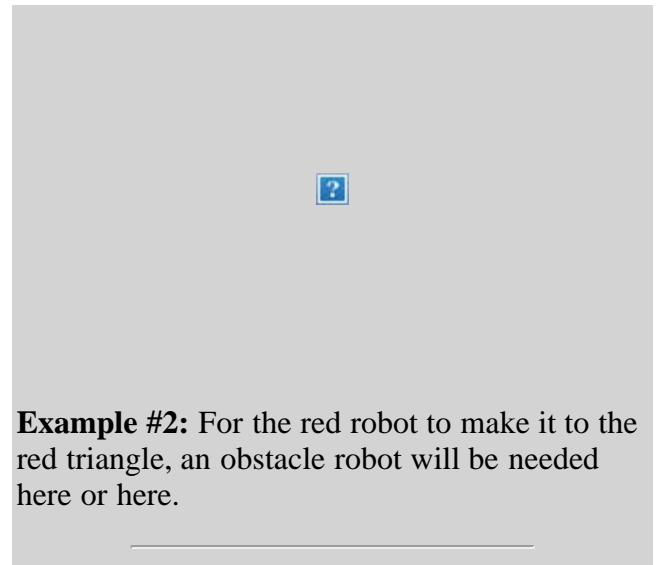
Example #2: For the red robot to make it to the red triangle, an obstacle robot will be needed here or here.

- Any robot that can follow the same path the active robot needs to take to make it near the target space. (Since you already spent time figuring out how to move the active robot near the target space, you'll save time and energy if you employ the same path to move the obstacle robot there as well.)
- The robot currently sitting nearest to the active robot. (Though you may not be able to use the exact same path the active robot needs to take, you may find a similar one.)
- The robot currently sitting nearest the target space. (Watch out. If the path of this robot isn't immediately obvious, you may have difficulties finding a route to put this robot into position.)
- Any other robot.

Step 4: Dance Like a Robot.

There are many clever ways to switch robots around back and forth by moving one, the other, and the first one back again. Take some time along and experiment with how the robots move and see what you learn. Some important combination moves are:

The Switch:

Example #3: The red robot moves up. The yellow robot moves right. The red robot moves back down. The yellow robot then moves left and uses the red robot as an obstacle to bounce into the target space.

The Be Where I Was:

Example #4: The green robot moves up. The blue robot moves left. The green robot moves back down, ricochets, and heads to the target space.

Reverse Engineering:

Example #5: An extension of the previous move. The green robot moves past the square where the blue robot will serve as an obstacle. Tis is one of the most important combinations, as it is slightly counter-intuitive and thus often overlooked. In the heat of the moment, players

who first imagine the placement of the obstacle robot sometimes forget that the active robot can still move through that space, as the obstacle robot isn't really there yet. So, green move down, left, and up. Blue moves left. Green moves down and right.

_____

The Double Your Fun:

Example #6: Yellow moves right and acts as an obstacle for Blue. Blue also moves right and acts as an obstacle for Red. Red bounces off blue and into the cosmic vortex.

_____
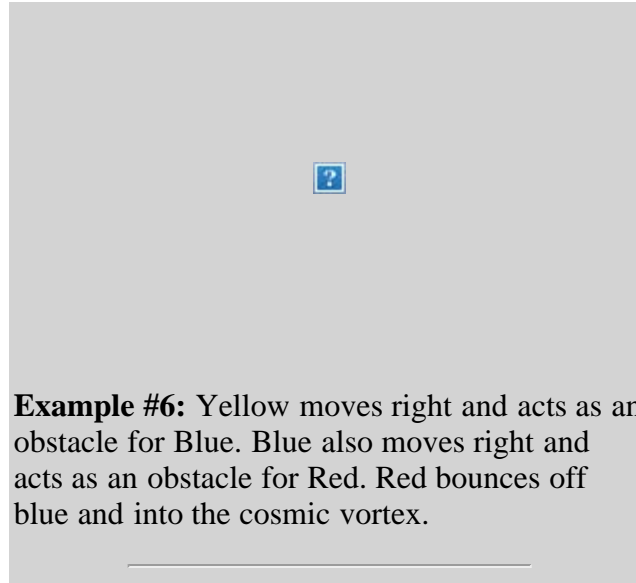
Step 5: "Be" the Robot.

Ricochet Robot isn't just a game, it's a way of life. All right, it's just a game. But it's a good game and players shouldn't be put off simply because they don't "get it" right away. The first time I played I lost. The second time I played I did even worse. But the third time . . . well! Well, it wasn't great, but then something "clicked." I saw how the game was supposed to work and suddenly the entire world changed. It was as if the software in my brain had been updated and yet, inexplicably, everything worked better than before. Keep at it and you'll get it too, and then you -- yes, even you -- can look like a genius at *Ricochet Robot*.

Quest For Lyre

by Kurt Brown

Art by ArtToday and John Green (courtesy of Dover Publications), colored by Jeremy Zauder

Player Information

The year is 50 AD and the Emperor Claudius sits on the throne of the Roman Empire. One day in early June the characters make their way to pay their respects to their Patron, Gaius Quintillus Martialus, a back-bench Senator of the Conservative party. Martialus greets his clients in their turn, spending a few moments chatting with them to determine what their needs might be. He seems a bit more distant than usual this morning, but deflects any inquiries as to the nature of his distraction. As the characters are leaving, they are intercepted by one of Martialus' servants who tells them that the Senator would like to speak with them privately. He requests that the party return around 11 a.m. for the midday meal.

The Audience

When the characters return they are escorted to the atrium of Martialus' home where the Senator awaits them. There, attentive servants offer them seats on stone benches that surround a small pond and serve them cheese and olives. The characters and the Senator engage in pleasant small talk during the meal that lasts about 30 minutes. After they have finished, servants fill their goblets with wine and retire to the kitchens, leaving the group to discuss more pressing matters.

Martialus addresses the group:

> "As you may know, we have been having some trouble recently with pirates raiding villas along our southern coast, a problem that I have been assured that the Army is handling. Unfortunately, their efforts are too late in one particular instance. I have received word that pirates raided my own villa near Brundisium just over a week ago. They made off with a fair amount of my personal possessions, and unfortunately several of my trusted servants lost their lives while defending the villa.

> "The loss of most of the personal property is not too great an issue. Apparently they managed to take my bust of Cicero, some of my Persian tapestries, and a few other minor items. But they did take one item that I cannot let go so easily. A lyre, valuable enough in its own right for its precious stones and gold leaf work, that means more to my family than ten times its value to other men.

> "This lyre has been handed down for five generations in my family, an heirloom that must not be lost. I fully intend that it should rest in the hands of my son Tullius someday, and not decorate the lair of some common thief. I would ask that you, my trusted associates, set yourselves to the task of recovering this

lyre and returning it safely to me. Your assistance will be greatly rewarded, and you need not worry for your businesses and families. I will make sure that neither suffers on account of my personal misfortune. Will you do this thing for me?"

Once the characters agree to assist their Patron, he will provide each of them with 1,000 sesterces to purchase any equipment or supplies that they may need. He also arranges transport to his villa on the coast near Brundisium and a letter for his headman, a servant named Calamis. Martialus will escort the party to the outskirts of Rome, asking that the party keep him posted as to their progress via regular written dispatches.

The Villa

After an uneventful weeklong trip the adventurers arrive at Martialus' estate on the coast of southeastern Italy. The estate is located in prime wheat growing country, the source of his family fortune. As the wagon comes within site of the main villa, a band of armed servants jog out to meet the party. An older man, darkened from many years of work under the Mediterranean sun, steps forward and introduces himself as Calamis, Martialus' headman. Once the characters introduce themselves and give Calamis the letter from his master he apologizes for the rude greeting, explaining that tensions have been running high since the raid. The servants escort the adventurers to the villa located on a hill overlooking the southern Adriatic Sea.

After more than two weeks of work, the servants have managed to repair most of the damage to Martialus' villa. Once inside the walls, the PCs will notice that there are signs of fire damage to one of the larger warehouses in the main compound but otherwise everything seems to be in order. Calamis orders the stable hands to take care of the horses and cart and escorts the party into the main domus, a whitewashed two-story affair at the crest of the hill.

Once inside, the characters are shown to the main triclinium of the house where a meal of cheese, bread, mutton and olives is served. As the party enjoys their meal, Calamis explains what happened on the night of the raid:

> "It was late, well past midnight, when the raiders struck. I don't know how they managed to get so close without being seen, but I guess that years of peace have made us complacent. The servants who were on guard duty were killed at their posts and the main gate was opened before anyone within the walls knew what had happened.
>
> "We still don't know exactly how many raiders there were, but it must have been around 20 or so judging by how much they managed to get away with. They were very stealthy. Some managed to get inside the main domus before the alarm was raised. We gathered what weapons we could and managed to drive them from the villa and down to the beach where their ship had been drawn up.
>
> "We took heavy losses. Five of our best field hands lost their lives, and several more were seriously wounded. We did manage to wound several of them though, and killed two before they withdrew. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough."

Calamis will provide the characters with a list of items that are missing and presumed to have been stolen from the villa. He shows them the rotting bodies of the raiders, dressed in leather tunics and boots, staked out on the beach as a warning to any other pirates that might happen by. Calamis also presents the party with the weapons they carried which are clearly of a Grecian style. As the characters continue their questioning of Calamis and the other servants, some interesting facts come to light:

- Calamis is fairly certain that he recognized the accents of the raiders. They were speaking Greek with an accent that indicated they were from Epirus, across the Adriatic from Brundisium. Their grammar was very precise, almost academic as opposed to the coarser dialog of common seamen.
- While the raiders managed to steal some very valuable items from the villa, they were oddly selective in their choices. The heavy bust of Cicero, the large Persian tapestries, the lyre, and other items were taken while smaller and more valuable items were left behind.
- The tactics of the raid seems to indicate that the pirates were not disorganized amateurs. Stealth is not a common

tactic of pirates, especially when dealing with an isolated villa such as Martialus'. The raiders were equipped with grappling hooks to scale the walls, and appear to have done so at several locations around the perimeter.

- When the raiders pulled back, it was simultaneously and with a minimum of disorganization. Characters with a military background can tell that it was clearly a withdrawal, not a retreat or a rout.
- The ship appeared to be of a military design, although in this part of the Mediterranean it is not uncommon for civilian vessels to be built in a similar style.

Calamis offers the characters the hospitality of the Villa as they ponder this information and plan their next move.

GM's Information

Senator Gaius Quintillus Martialus is weaving a complex web designed to discredit and eventually replace the governor of Epirus with his own son. The governor of Epirus, Lucius Cornelius Pulcher, is not one of the better examples of Roman sensibility. In addition to heavily taxing his province and pocketing a good deal of that revenue for himself, it is rumored that his agents visited the homes of wealthy locals and "borrowed" their finer pieces of artwork for his own private collection. He has maintained his governorship due to his connections with the family of the Emperor, but it is widely felt that if it were not for that, he would find himself up before the courts on charges of corruption and extortion. Martialus decided several years ago that this situation must be remedied, and who better to assume the post than his own son?

Quest For Lyre

During the last two years, Martialus has had agent provocateurs encouraging the more disillusioned citizens of Epirus to raid Roman settlements along the eastern coast of Italy. While the piracy has raised concerns, especially among the rural farmers of that region, it has yet to attract the full attention of the Senate or the Emperor. Martialus hopes that the raid on his own villa and the loss of a cherished family heirloom will allow him to stir the indignity of his fellow Senators enough to press for the dismissal of Governor Pulcher.

The raiders, mercenaries hired from the ranks of retired marines, were sent against Martialus' estate with the goal of securing the lyre and transporting it back to Epirus. Once there, the mercenaries were to ensure that the lyre found its way into the hands of Governor Pulcher, either as a gift or as payment of tribute. Martialus hopes that the PCs will discover the lyre in the possession of Pulcher thereby "proving" that the raiders originated in his province and leaving him open to an investigation to expose his corruption.

Once the characters reach Epirus and begin their inquiries, they attract the attention of Martialus' agents who steer them towards the governor in Nicopolis. When they reach the governor's palace, they are greeted with a pointed lack of enthusiasm. Pulcher knows that Martialus is not a friend, and views the characters with suspicion. He is not overtly hostile to the characters since he knows that his governorship is drawing unwanted attention and does not want to make matters worse.

Pulcher invites the characters to join him for dinner, a sumptuous affair with extravagant dishes, entertainment, and dozens of guests. The highlight of the evening is a selection of songs . . . performed by the host on his newly acquired lyre.

When confronted about the lyre, Pulcher insists that he received it as a gift from one of his subjects and vehemently denies any knowledge about how it was acquired. Pulcher knows that if word gets back to Rome that he has Martialus' lyre, he will certainly be recalled to stand trial for his other excesses. He will attempt to convince the characters to investigate further in an effort to uncover Martialus' duplicity, and enthusiastically offers his assistance in this effort. If the characters insist on returning to Rome with the lyre, Pulcher may decide to have them eliminated by his own agents

in order to protect his position in Epirus.

If the characters decide that there is enough information to warrant an investigation of Martialus' plot, they become the targets of his local agents and the mercenary sailors who raided the villa. If they survive, Pulcher will offer to accompany them to Rome to present their case before the Senate. Martialus will do whatever he can to prevent this from happening, leading to chases across the Adriatic and through the rolling Italian countryside. He knows that his career, and possibly his life, hang in the balance.

Once the characters arrive and make their case before the Senate, the political fireworks will be memorable. Both Pulcher's and Martialus' careers are in jeopardy, and the promise of exciting and humiliating hearings will draw large crowds of curious plebes and nobles.

Since their testimony is vital to both Martialus and Pulcher, they will be caught in the middle of a struggle to win their loyalty that both parties are unwilling to lose. Martialus will play to the characters sense of loyalty to their patron and their moral indignation regarding Pulcher's governorship of Epirus. Pulcher will appeal to the adventurer's outrage at Martialus' casual disregard for Roman life and his duplicity in sending the characters on a mission to frame an innocent man.

Martialus stands to lose more than Pulcher. While Pulcher's actions are considered distasteful, it is not uncommon behavior throughout the Empire. The attention that is focused on him as a result of the investigation will cost him his governorship, but it is a price that he is willing to pay in order to expose the greater crimes of Martialus.

Martialus, depending on the quality of the evidence presented against him, can expect to be stripped of his land and titles. At best he will be exiled from Rome. His encouragement of pirate raids on Roman territory is treason and could lead to his execution. If it becomes clear that the case has turned irrevocably against him, he will choose suicide over public humiliation.

The characters' actions and testimony during the hearings gains them a certain amount of notoriety in Rome. Depending on which side their testimony favors they could find themselves courted by supporters of the Emperor, conservatives secretly working for a return to the days of the Republic, or other nobles who find people with the adventurers' skills and point of view useful. They could also find themselves the targets of retribution from Martialus' son or supporters of Pulcher or both, depending on the outcome of the trial.

Goals: Achieving (and Leaving) Them

Why do your characters do what they do?

Why do they go into dungeons to cast spells at kobolds, or dress up in Spandex to stop jaywalkers, or prowl the sinister courts of Vladintheplacewhereyoulive the Vampire King?

Or, perhaps put a different way, why *don't* they do something else . . . something safer? Why don't they cast spells for a village shop, or start up a Spandex talk show, or find a small farming community Vladintheplacewhereyoulive's never even *heard* of and enjoy immortality?

In a lot of campaigns it can be important to have an idea of motivation; if you don't, then not only do you not know why you're doing something, you don't know when you'll *stop*.

Consider, for example, the Caped Avenger. The Caped Avenger saw a thief kill his kindly aunt and uncle as a child, and dons pajamas and a cape and prowls the streets of Crime-Ridden City to avenge their deaths. We know why he does it, but when will he give it up? Is he going to keep fighting until he dies? Until he gets too old? Until he can find a replacement? What if he were presented with an opportunity to help more people . . . for example, if he were offered a job as police chief of Crime-Ridden City? Or an opportunity as senator?

What about a religious crusader in the Middle Ages? He may strap on a sword and go off to war, but why? Is it for glory? For wealth? For duty to his nation? For a deeply seated faith? What could cause him to question crusading?

In real life many of us know when we're quitting whatever it is we do; we're working towards a pension, or towards retirement, or towards another career offer or opportunity. In roleplaying games, though, the careers and dynamics of a gaming world are significantly different; the 401K plan for a thief is notoriously unreliable.

A lack of motivation, either for adventuring or *not* adventuring, can make matters difficult on the GM. Creating interesting and logical plot hooks can be more difficult without a motivation. If you're just a hired assassin, with no other goals or motivations than killin' folks and getting' paid, how many times can the phone ring with a job offer before you've got enough money and/or you're bored (as a player *or* character)?

Goals can be short-term and/or specific (find the man who shot your paw, finding the mystery ingredient for Blue Goo Stew, get your name on the front page of *USA Today*, meet the President). They can be medium-term and somewhat nebulous (earn enough money to start a business, concoct a magical formula that helps the world, becoming famous). They can be very general and/or open-ended (help the world, leave a legacy, make your parent proud).

They can be achievable (becoming a competent wizard, running away from home), difficult (be the first cyborg to travel to the moon, learn the truth about aliens), nigh-impossible (defeat the Naughty Cult that threatens the earth, recovering the staff of seventeen parts), or impossible and/or unending (defeat all those who would commit crime, amass as much wealth/power/Legos as possible).

Now, just because you may have a goal for a character, life can do interesting things; you may accomplish that goal, only to realize you didn't really want it or now have another new goal; once you've successfully run away from home, then what? You may realize that the Neverending Battle is just too draining, and seek a replacement to pass the torch on. You may fall madly in love, and your new cuddle bunny may not *approve* of someone who chases after the Naughty Cult full time. You may wake up, naked in an alleyway and surrounded by Legos with no idea how you got there, and realize there's more to life than this . . . like Capsula.

For those of you already considering your characters' (and NPCs') motivations, keep it up! I know I am personally comfortable with coming up with motivations for my characters, but I'm a lot worse at coming up with reasons (good or bad) why they'd *stop*.

And for those of you creating your first mighty warrior, wide-eyed and ready to rid the world of evil, ask yourself, "Okay; what'll they do once *that's* done?"

* * *

Am I the only one who, whenever creating a character with bad eyes, makes them far-sighted and wearing glasses, just in case they need to start a fire and don't any other means of fire creation?

Just curious. I was thinking that today when I got my eyes examined and desperately trying to distract myself with *anything* other than the wide array of torture devices aimed at my squeamish eyes.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Don't Ask!**, an adventure with Ambush Bug for Mayfair's **DC Heroes RPG**.

(Three stars) "Figgerfurbingurbinburbibmurbinmitzermurbin!"

The Wildly Alternate History Campaign

"Less is a bore."
-- Philip Johnson

Slightly over two years ago, I wrote a column extolling the merits of the "Slightly Alternate History" -- the minimalist art of altering only the tiniest data necessary to present the historical conoisseur with the veriest frisson of change. Suitable for historically-minded GMs and strongly simulationist players, the Slightly Alternate History presents a number of unique and piquant opportunities. And obviates or ignores a host of others. This week, a perhaps overdue look at blowing the doors off, tossing history in the blender, messing around with the contrast and the brightness at will and establishing the Wildly Alternate History campaign.

Big changes require largeness of vision on the part of the GM, and largeness of spirit on the part of the players. Halfway measures and halting explanations only spoil the joy, the delight, the old-time Sense Of Wonder at seeing Egyptian pyramids along the Mississippi, or space-stations boasting Alexander the Great's coat of arms, or Apache buffalo-standards fluttering over a radioactive London. The GM has to have a reason to blow it up, in other words, if only so the players can enjoy the earth-shattering (or at least history-shattering) KA-BOOM. The players, meanwhile, have to be the sort who are willing to reinforce their suspended disbelief for the reward of a good story, a rollicking setting, or a world-design exercise. Absent a really gripping campaign, a swell scenario will do; a series of Wildly Alternate Histories works well in dimension-hopping campaigns, where the PCs have already moved on to the Tibeto-Basque Warworld before the Khmer Psiocracy has a chance to show its seams.

Just like astrophysicists watching *Star Wars*, historical pedants (such as myself) need to sharply check their intentions before entering the Wildly Alternate History game. If the GM can maintain unity of theme, realism of character interaction, or just a rip-roaring story that drags players into it willy-nilly, even the most churlish of players should give the game the benefit of the doubt. And come on, people, if you're willing to play in games with dragons, or telepaths, or functioning conspiracies, let the Egyptians build their steamships, okay? It's a game, not a doctoral thesis. If your players aren't historical pedants, or are (even better) blissfully ignorant of the fundamental weaknesses of the Inca empire, then go to town. As long as you show no fear (and provide a rocking game), they'll happily accept the zeppelins of Tupac Amaru raiding the Spanish Main for uranium.

"The destiny of mankind is not decided by material computation. When great causes are on the move in the world . . . we learn that we are spirits, not animals, and that something is going on in space and time, and beyond space and time, which, whether we like it or not, spells duty."
-- Sir Winston Churchill, June 16, 1941

For a Wildly Alternate History that starts with a single change point, making it a big one is crucial. I recommend a world war, at a minimum. Don't lose your grip midway through and actually evaluate German tank performance; stick to your imaginary guns and drive the Wehrmacht on to Reich-5 from *GURPS Alternate Earths*. Here, we went for Wild Alternacy; fascist America, genemod Japanese super-ninjas, Luftwaffe skyhooks, the works. Similarly, Reality Caliph, from *GURPS Alternate Earths 2*, gives another world war (between Islam and Christendom) a reverse, and goes on from there, always in the direction of imagery -- Arabian Nights -- and excess -- nanotechnological superwar!

Or, rather than starting from a Big Cause, aim at a Big Result. Global Empire, or at least global hegemony, works well at establishing scope while unifying theme (and thus minimizing design work for the harried GM). Roma Aeterna (from *GURPS Alternate Earths*) and Ming-3 (from its sequel) both demonstrate what can be accomplished (for the Romans and Chinese, respectively) with sufficient grandiosity of vision and sufficient disregard for puling matters of likelihood or fashionable neo-Spenglerian theories of cultural senescence. A recognizably Pharaonic Egyptian culture lasted almost four millennia; surely it's the act of a petty, carping miser to refuse to allow another two, with a few gratuitous twists here and there as obeisance to Clio. Alexander lives longer, ruling from Alexandria; Mark Antony defeats Octavian and the Eastern Empire becomes a Pharaonic epigone; the Valentinian Gnostics establish a syncretic Egyptiac culture after the fall of Catholic Rome -- see how close we are to those pyramids on the Vicksburg bluffs? It's this kind of special pleading and hindsight I used when building Reality Midgard, in *AE2*, with every juncture

"luckily" going the way of the Norse. Hey, if you're a Marxist (or a Whig), you believe in a teleological history anyway, so why not switch endings on a whim?

"Like all the Second Level, its timelines descend from the probability of one or more shiploads of colonists having come to Terra from Mars about seventy-five to a hundred thousand years ago, and then having been cut off from the home planet and forced to develop a civilization of their own here."
-- Paratime Policeman Verkan Vall, in "Last Enemy," by H. Beam Piper

Of course some worlds require a little something extra to help them along, even with charitably-minded players and well-waved GM hands. Worlds like the Aztec-dominated Ezcalli (from *GURPS Alternate Earths*) or Reality Futura (from this [earlier column](#)) depend crucially on players even more willing than normal to avoid looking at the man behind the curtain. For worlds like these, the GM is wise to stock a suitable range of deii ex machina. Some of them, like the nuclear war we used to establish Centrum (in *AE2*), are blunt but effective instruments: pick the culture you want to win, and decimate all the others. Smacking the Earth (or carefully targeted portions thereof) with a [Tunguska](#), or a [Pole Shift](#), or a megaplague, can accomplish the same effect. Want the Indians and Africans to thrive? Mutate the Black Death and wipe out 99% of Eurasia. A handy religious mania can spread your chosen culture to the far reaches of the world, just as Islam did for Arabic (and Persian) culture in Real History. Give the Balinese a Mohammed and a lot of boats, and watch those Hindu temples rise on the shores of Puget Sound.

With a sufficiently blithe attitude on the part of the GM, even more radical prime movers can set the world starkly akilter. Alien contact at any time in Earth's history can have any result the GM wishes, and is particularly handy for that Global Hittite Empire (blasters + antigrav + immortality treatments = permanent overlordship) or similarly implausible survival. Another good way to add permanence to some otherwise doomed culture is to grant it psionics; if the Tocharian savants of Sinkiang develop workable psi powers, they can build a mighty Nestorian Empire of Prester John with it in time for your "star crusade" campaign. The unlikely present can also result from temporal meddling back in the softly vulnerable past; I once built a self-indulgent Celtic-Khazar parallel for a "time patrol" game and justified it with a fortuitous time-machine crash around 450 A.D. If not time meddlers, perhaps the Conspiracy has some reason for King Ludwig of Bavaria to unite continental Europe in a mad Gingerbread Empire, or for the Kongolese slaves in Brazil to suddenly create a mighty creolized empire in South America with fortuitous aid from Benjamin Franklin and Alexander Hamilton. On yet another level, the gods from the machine can be, quite simply, gods -- the reason that the Maya conquered Spain was that Chac-Mool and Kulkulkan fought on their side in heaven. Present any of the above as a mystery to be solved, and even the more romantic breed of pedant can be drawn into the adventure. ("Aha! Minoan Crete was the heir to Atlantean technology -- that's how they built an empire that lasted until 1952.")

"Thus if the basic statements in their turn are to be inter-subjectively testable, there can be no ultimate statements in science: there can be no statements in science which cannot be tested, and therefore none which cannot in principle be refuted, by falsifying some of the conclusions which can be deduced from them."
-- Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*

So much for the how and why; let's go back to the when and what. One good way to get a Wildly Alternate History is to discard an assumption about the "natural course of history" or the "laws of history" or any of that bunk. For Shikaku-Mon in *GURPS Alternate Earths*, we removed "Westernization" from the West and created a Japanese hegemony beginning in the 17th century. Abandon some other legacies of our reality: there's nothing particularly inevitable, or permanent, about the nation-state. A suitably broad-based catastrophe (like the Blight in *GURPS Autoduel* or [Reality Rust](#)) could wreck it in the industrial era, and with a few tweaks to human cussedness, Europe's kings might never have brought nationhood out of feudalism in the 15th century. I can easily picture some stuffy political scientist in a world of Icelandic-style anarchies pontificate, with faultless socioeconometrics, that man-portable firearms and the potato make large-scale government simply impossible to maintain.

While we're tweaking human nature around, how about reversing patriarchy? Pick your matriarchal society (the neo-Frazerian one postulated by Marija Gimbutas and Riane Eisler is always a favorite) and have it serve as the template for future civilization, with monotheistic Goddess churches and the "divine right of queens." Re-shuffle the biological cards described by Jared Diamond in *Guns, Germs, and Steel* -- give Kenya triticale, or Mexico the ox, or Europe the

Chinese disaster regime. Swap migration patterns around; send the Aryans across the Pacific like H. Beam Piper did in *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*, or point the Celts east instead of west, or send the Athapaskans south instead of over the Bering Straits and have the Sioux wind up running China. Move hominid evolution to South America instead of Africa, and have the primitive tribes of Eurasia die in droves when sophisticated American explorers reach their mud huts in the Thames Valley. Heck, leave the Neanderthals alive, and face humanity with an implacable, equally-intelligent rival for the same ecological niche down through to the atomic age. Keep Peking Man alive, too, for high-quality Orwell-meets-Leakey fun in a three-way struggle between alien races over the same planet.

"Over and above everything else should tower the stark, outrageous monstrousness of the one chosen departure from Nature . . . Even when the wonder is one to which the characters are assumed to be used, the sense of awe, marvel, and strangeness which the reader would feel in the presence of such a thing must somehow be suggested by the author."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction"

You can build almost any science fiction world from the stock of human history and culture (heck, that's where most SF authors got them in the first place), and when you add prehistory things just get wilder. Give your dinosaur civilization the handwaving Harry Harrison does in *West of Eden*, or just pop domesticated dinosaurs into a weirdly alternate Babylon, or Renaissance Florence, or Revolutionary America after the example of Brian Aldiss' *Malacia Tapestry*. Or stretch rubber science even further; imagine a Bronze Age mathematical conception that unveils antigravity to Hammurabi, or Euclid, or Leonardo. (Harry Turtledove's "The Road Not Taken" has fun with the notion of space travel at medieval tech levels.) Just pick a doubletalk science from alchemy to mesmerism to Teslatomics, make it real and run from there. Magic, of course, makes things even wilder, and topples us breathlessly over into a (fully topo-mapped) fantasy world, explicable by any of our deii ex machina, or by nothing more detailed than GM fiat. Just tell your players that God said, "Let there be wildness." They'll see that it is good.

Quest For Lyre

A GURPS: Imperial Rome Adventure for 2-6 Players

by Kurt Brown

Player Information

The year is 50 AD and the Emperor Claudius sits on the throne of the Roman Empire. One day in early June the characters make their way to pay their respects to their Patron, Gaius Quintillus Martialus, a back-bench Senator of the Conservative party. Martialus greets his clients in their turn, spending a few moments chatting with them to determine what their needs might be. He seems a bit more distant than usual this morning, but deflects any inquiries as to the nature of his distraction. As the characters are leaving, they are intercepted by one of Martialus' servants who tells them that the Senator would like to speak with them privately. He requests that the party return around 11 a.m. for the midday meal.

The Audience

When the characters return they are escorted to the atrium of Martialus' home where the Senator awaits them. There, attentive servants offer them seats on stone benches that surround a small pond and serve them cheese and olives. The characters and the Senator engage in pleasant small talk during the meal that lasts about 30 minutes. After they have finished, servants fill their goblets with wine and retire to the kitchens, leaving the group to discuss more pressing matters.

Martialus addresses the group:

> "As you may know, we have been having some trouble recently with pirates raiding villas along our southern coast, a problem that I have been assured that the Army is handling. Unfortunately, their efforts are too late in one particular instance. I have received word that pirates raided my own villa near Brundisium just over a week ago. They made off with a fair amount of my personal possessions, and unfortunately several of my trusted servants lost their lives while defending the villa.

> "The loss of most of the personal property is not too great an issue. Apparently they managed to take my bust of Cicero, some of my Persian tapestries, and a few other minor items. But they did take one item that I cannot let go so easily. A lyre, valuable enough in its own right for its precious stones and gold leaf work, that means more to my family than ten times its value to other men.

> "This lyre has been handed down for five generations in my family, an heirloom that must not be lost. I fully intend that it should rest in the hands of my son Tullius someday, and not decorate the lair of some common thief. I would ask that you, my trusted associates, set yourselves to the task of recovering this lyre and returning it safely to me. Your assistance will be greatly rewarded, and you need not worry for your businesses and families. I will make sure that neither suffers on account of my personal misfortune. Will you do this thing for me?"

Once the characters agree to assist their Patron, he will provide each of them with 1,000 sesterces to purchase any equipment or supplies that they may need. He also arranges transport to his villa on the coast near Brundisium and a letter for his headman, a servant named Calamis. Martialus will escort the party to the outskirts of Rome, asking that the party keep him posted as to their progress via regular written dispatches.

The Villa

After an uneventful weeklong trip the adventurers arrive at Martialus' estate on the coast of southeastern Italy. The estate is located in prime wheat growing country, the source of his family fortune. As the wagon comes within site of the main villa, a band of armed servants jog out to meet the party. An older man, darkened from many years of work under the Mediterranean sun, steps forward and introduces himself as Calamis, Martialus' headman. Once the characters introduce themselves and give Calamis the letter from his master he apologizes for the rude greeting, explaining that tensions have been running high since the raid. The servants escort the adventurers to the villa located on a hill overlooking the southern Adriatic Sea.

After more than two weeks of work, the servants have managed to repair most of the damage to Martialus' villa. Once inside the walls, the PCs will notice that there are signs of fire damage to one of the larger warehouses in the main compound but otherwise everything seems to be in order. Calamis orders the stable hands to take care of the horses and cart and escorts the party into the main domus, a whitewashed two-story affair at the crest of the hill.

Once inside, the characters are shown to the main triclinium of the house where a meal of cheese, bread, mutton and olives is served. As the party enjoys their meal, Calamis explains what happened on the night of the raid:

> "It was late, well past midnight, when the raiders struck. I don't know how they managed to get so close without being seen, but I guess that years of peace have made us complacent. The servants who were on guard duty were killed at their posts and the main gate was opened before anyone within the walls knew what had happened.
>
> "We still don't know exactly how many raiders there were, but it must have been around 20 or so judging by how much they managed to get away with. They were very stealthy. Some managed to get inside the main domus before the alarm was raised. We gathered what weapons we could and managed to drive them from the villa and down to the beach where their ship had been drawn up.
>
> "We took heavy losses. Five of our best field hands lost their lives, and several more were seriously wounded. We did manage to wound several of them though, and killed two before they withdrew. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough."

Calamis will provide the characters with a list of items that are missing and presumed to have been stolen from the villa. He shows them the rotting bodies of the raiders, dressed in leather tunics and boots, staked out on the beach as a warning to any other pirates that might happen by. Calamis also presents the party with the weapons they carried which are clearly of a Grecian style. As the characters continue their questioning of Calamis and the other servants, some interesting facts come to light:

- Calamis is fairly certain that he recognized the accents of the raiders. They were speaking Greek with an accent that indicated they were from Epirus, across the Adriatic from Brundisium. Their grammar was very precise, almost academic as opposed to the coarser dialog of common seamen.
- While the raiders managed to steal some very valuable items from the villa, they were oddly selective in their choices. The heavy bust of Cicero, the large Persian tapestries, the lyre, and other items were taken while smaller and more valuable items were left behind.
- The tactics of the raid seems to indicate that the pirates were not disorganized amateurs. Stealth is not a common tactic of pirates, especially when dealing with an isolated villa such as Martialus'. The raiders were equipped with grappling hooks to scale the walls, and appear to have done so at several locations around the perimeter.
- When the raiders pulled back, it was simultaneously and with a minimum of disorganization. Characters with a military background can tell that it was clearly a withdrawal, not a retreat or a rout.
- The ship appeared to be of a military design, although in this part of the Mediterranean it is not uncommon for civilian vessels to be built in a similar style.

Calamis offers the characters the hospitality of the Villa as they ponder this information and plan their next move.

GM's Information

Senator Gaius Quintillus Martialus is weaving a complex web designed to discredit and eventually replace the governor of Epirus with his own son. The governor of Epirus, Lucius Cornelius Pulcher, is not one of the better examples of Roman sensibility. In addition to heavily taxing his province and pocketing a good deal of that revenue for himself, it is rumored that his agents visited the homes of wealthy locals and "borrowed" their finer pieces of artwork for his own private collection. He has maintained his governorship due to his connections with the family of the Emperor, but it is widely felt that if it were not for that, he would find himself up before the courts on charges of corruption and extortion. Martialus decided several years ago that this situation must be remedied, and who better to assume the post than his own son?

During the last two years, Martialus has had agent provocateurs encouraging the more disillusioned citizens of Epirus to raid Roman settlements along the eastern coast of Italy. While the piracy has raised concerns, especially among the rural farmers of that region, it has yet to attract the full attention of the Senate or the Emperor. Martialus hopes that the raid on his own villa and the loss of a cherished family heirloom will allow him to stir the indignity of his fellow Senators enough to press for the dismissal of Governor Pulcher.

The raiders, mercenaries hired from the ranks of retired marines, were sent against Martialus' estate with the goal of securing the lyre and transporting it back to Epirus. Once there, the mercenaries were to ensure that the lyre found its way into the hands of Governor Pulcher, either as a gift or as payment of tribute. Martialus hopes that the PCs will discover the lyre in the possession of Pulcher thereby "proving" that the raiders originated in his province and leaving him open to an investigation to expose his corruption.

Once the characters reach Epirus and begin their inquiries, they attract the attention of Martialus' agents who steer them towards the governor in Nicopolis. When they reach the governor's palace, they are greeted with a pointed lack of enthusiasm. Pulcher knows that Martialus is not a friend, and views the characters with suspicion. He is not overtly hostile to the characters since he knows that his governorship is drawing unwanted attention and does not want to make matters worse.

Pulcher invites the characters to join him for dinner, a sumptuous affair with extravagant dishes, entertainment, and dozens of guests. The highlight of the evening is a selection of songs . . . performed by the host on his newly acquired lyre.

When confronted about the lyre, Pulcher insists that he received it as a gift from one of his subjects and vehemently denies any knowledge about how it was acquired. Pulcher knows that if word gets back to Rome that he has Martialus' lyre, he will certainly be recalled to stand trial for his other excesses. He will attempt to convince the characters to investigate further in an effort to uncover Martialus' duplicity, and enthusiastically offers his assistance in this effort. If the characters insist on returning to Rome with the lyre, Pulcher may decide to have them eliminated by his own agents in order to protect his position in Epirus.

If the characters decide that there is enough information to warrant an investigation of Martialus' plot, they become the targets of his local agents and the mercenary sailors who raided the villa. If they survive, Pulcher will offer to accompany them to Rome to present their case before the Senate. Martialus will do whatever he can to prevent this from happening, leading to chases across the Adriatic and through the rolling Italian countryside. He knows that his career, and possibly his life, hang in the balance.

Once the characters arrive and make their case before the Senate, the political fireworks will be memorable. Both Pulcher's and Martialus' careers are in jeopardy, and the promise of exciting and humiliating hearings will draw large crowds of curious plebes and nobles.

Since their testimony is vital to both Martialus and Pulcher, they will be caught in the middle of a struggle to win their loyalty that both parties are unwilling to lose. Martialus will play to the characters sense of loyalty to their patron and their moral indignation regarding Pulcher's governorship of Epirus. Pulcher will appeal to the adventurer's outrage at Martialus' casual disregard for Roman life and his duplicity in sending the characters on a mission to frame an innocent man.

Martialus stands to lose more than Pulcher. While Pulcher's actions are considered distasteful, it is not uncommon behavior throughout the Empire. The attention that is focused on him as a result of the investigation will cost him his governorship, but it is a price that he is willing to pay in order to expose the greater crimes of Martialus.

Martialus, depending on the quality of the evidence presented against him, can expect to be stripped of his land and titles. At best he will be exiled from Rome. His encouragement of pirate raids on Roman territory is treason and could lead to his execution. If it becomes clear that the case has turned irrevocably against him, he will choose suicide over public humiliation.

The characters' actions and testimony during the hearings gains them a certain amount of notoriety in Rome. Depending on which side their testimony favors they could find themselves courted by supporters of the Emperor, conservatives secretly working for a return to the days of the Republic, or other nobles who find people with the adventurers' skills and point of view useful. They could also find themselves the targets of retribution from Martialus' son or supporters of Pulcher or both, depending on the outcome of the trial.

by Ralph Dula

Art by John Hartwell and colored by Jeremy Zauder

Go through back issues of DC comics, and you're bound to find new character options for West End Games' *DC Universe RPG*. Here are a few new advantages and disadvantages for this game, plus representative characters.

New Advantages

Reputation (-2D): A city, group or race, chosen when this advantage is purchased, is disposed to act favorably to the hero. This might come from deeds the hero has performed, his level of expertise in a skill the chosen group favors, or from outright fear of the character. Whatever the reason the hero gains +1 success to any Presence or related skill rolls involving the chosen group. This Advantage can be chosen multiple times, so the hero may have favorable standing with several different groups.
Representative Characters: John Constantine (mages and demons), Superman (Metropolis)

Weapons Master (-2D to -4D): The character has trained himself to the point of perfection in armed combat, getting +1 success on his attack rolls.

At -2D the character gains a bonus with one selected group of weapons: pistols, knives, clubs, etc. Alternately, the hero may specialize in a unique weapon he possesses.
Representative Characters: Electrocutioner, Tim Trench

At -3D the character may specialize in a class of weapons, such as firearms, bladed weapons, energy weapons, and so on. The +1 success bonus is gained when using any weapon belonging to the class chosen.
Representative Characters: Cannon & Saber, Deadshot

At -4D the character is skilled in every sort of weapon, from knives to field artillery, gaining a +1 bonus with any weapon he uses.
Representative Character: Peacemaker

New Disadvantages

Bad Luck (+6D): The character has been given the dirty end of the stick by fate. The character has a -1 success to every roll he makes, and a roll of a normal failure on the Wild Die counts as a critical failure as well.
Representative Character: J. Wilbur Wolfingham, Predator

Easy Come, Easy Go (+1D): The hero may not be a fool, but he and his money are soon parted (this disadvantage may not be taken by characters with the Poor disadvantage). Whether the hero gambles his money away, spends it on experiments, or gives it to the needy, cash does not stay in his wallet for long. At the start of every game session the hero must make a Moderate Willpower roll, failure of which means the hero has spent all of the money available to him from his job or the Wealth advantage. The Narrator should enforce this problem with role-playing, as the hero must relay on his friends or the kindness of strangers to meet any financial needs during the adventure.
Representative Character: Blue Beetle

Loyalty (+3D): The character possesses total, unwavering faith in an individual, who is present in the character's life almost constantly. Unlike a dependent, the individual a hero is loyal to is just as competent as the hero, if not more so. Whenever the person the character is loyal to makes a request of him the hero must make a Moderate Willpower roll not to do what is asked of him. Additionally, whenever the hero hears the person he is loyal to is in trouble he must do all that he can to aid him or her, no matter the cost to himself.
Representative Character: Robin (to Batman)

Multiple Memories (+6D): The hero has the memories and personalities of multiple individuals in his subconscious.

He may be a psychic vampire who retains the memories of his victims, an individual who has been reincarnated countless times, or a telepath who has read minds for many years and kept residual memories of all the thoughts he scanned. Whatever the case the character has a seething mass of personalities in his mind, waiting to break free.

Whenever a character with Multiple Memories is hit with a Mental Blast he must make a Willpower total as her next action, with a difficulty equal to the number of successes the attacker rolled with his Mental Blast. Failure to do so results in the character being overwhelmed by a rush of his subconscious memories, rendering him incapable of action. This condition lasts for a number of rounds equal to the number of successes the Willpower roll was missed by, so if an attacker has 9 successes with Mental Blast and the individual with Multiple Memories gets 4 successes on his Willpower roll the victim is incapacitated for five rounds.

Alternately, a character aware of a character's Multiple Memories may use Telepathy to activate them. The telepath makes a resisted roll against the target's Willpower, just as when normally using Telepathy against an unwilling subject, with the number of successes the telepath gets the number of rounds the victim is incapacitated.

If a character gets no successes on his Willpower roll to resist his Multiple Memories his mind is overwhelmed by the thoughts for an indefinite time, requiring outside assistance (as determined by the Narrator) before he can act again.
Representative Characters: The Parasite, Kingdom Come's Martian Manhunter

New Form (+1, +2, or +4D): The body the character is currently inhabiting is not his original form. It may not even be of the same gender or race that the character started life as. The level taken in this Disadvantage indicates the difficulty the character has due to his new form.

At +1D there has been little difficulty in the change from the old body to the current one. Either the character lives in a society accepting of such a change or made preparations before the body swap so that he or she could live in the new form with few or no questions being raised. The character still has access to any contacts or resources they possessed in their previous form, though said contacts may be unaware they are dealing with the same person.
Representative Character: Lex Luthor, while posing as his own son.

At +2D the character finds that his new form proves problematic. Those that knew the hero in her previous identity do not accept her now, and are quite troubled by the stranger claiming to be an old friend; the character has a -1 success penalty to any Presence roll made involving such individuals. The character also has no access to any items or wealth they possessed in their previous identity.
Representative Character: Immortal Man

At +4D the character's new body is nothing but trouble. The body he now possesses not only looks nothing like his original form, it is also not of the same race the character started out as. Individuals whose personalities have been transferred into machines, been mutated into monstrosities, or even joined the ranks of the undead would be examples of this level of New Body. The character possesses a -3 successes penalty to any Presence roll made to former friends, along with no access to any resources or contacts possessed in the old body. Also, the character's new form is so distinctive that the character will stick out like a sore thumb no matter how he tries to hide his appearance, illusion and shapeshifting powers notwithstanding; the character suffers a -2 success penalty with the Disguise skill and the Hide skill when trying to blend into large crowds.
Representative Characters: Duke of Oil, Patchwork Man

Weirdness Magnet (+3D): For reasons unknown to the hero fate has decreed he will continually encounter the strangest aspects of reality. Cursed antiques often make their way into the hero's possession, evil cults decide he will be the perfect sacrifice to their god, and long-lost friends turn up as foes. Whenever an odd event is to occur to a randomly-chosen character the hero possessing the Weirdness Magnet disadvantage is always the one affected; if two or more characters are Weirdness Magnets then all of them are somehow affected by the event.
Representative Character: Blue Devil

The Compleat Familiar

by Anthony Jackson

Art by Kent Burles, colored by Jeremy Zauder

The rules for familiars in *GURPS Magic* have some appealing aspects, but they are also somewhat incompatible with a variety of other advantages which do similar things, and, at about a page and a half, they barely scratch the surface of what a familiar can be. This article revises and expands the rules for familiars.

What is a Familiar, and Why Should You Have One?

Traditionally in western mythology, a familiar is a sort of demonic ally for a witch, generally appearing in the form of an imp or small animal; it assists the witch with spellcasting in some unclear way. Note that a black cat or similar animal associated with a witch might or might not be a familiar -- it could also be the witch, shapeshifted into that form.

The tradition of familiars in Fantasy and RPGs is quite a bit broader, to a large degree because magic users in fantasy are not automatically assumed to be evil and have sold their souls to the devil. Still, in general if it's actually called a familiar it will be an animal or minor supernatural entity, with some mystical connection to the mage. In a somewhat broader sense, there are a variety of things which are not called familiars but are functionally the same -- for example, catalyst creatures in *Psionics* could be considered familiars.

While the definition of a familiar is moderately clear, the exact role of the familiar is not. Some literary familiars don't seem to have any role beyond making smartass comments, which makes one wonder why the mage has a familiar in the first place. While the chance to harass the players can be perfectly useful for a GM, players usually want a better reason. A few suggestions:

- Taking a familiar is somehow a rite of passage for a mage. In this case a familiar might actually be a prerequisite for higher levels of magery.
- Familiars aren't required, but they assist in some useful way with spellcasting.
- Familiars aren't required, but they provide other mystical benefits.
- Or, of course, a familiar could just be a ally, likely with exceptional abilities.

Non-mages and Familiars

While it is rare for anyone who isn't considered a witch or wizard to have something actually called a familiar, it's perfectly possible for a non-mage to have an ally who fulfils essentially the same role. This is a very broad category, but in general one of the following should be true: the familiar is a kind of creature who naturally forms such bonds (for example, Pernese dragons), or the character has a special connection with that form of animal (such as a totem animal, a knight's warhorse, a wolf to a werewolf, a cat to a priest of Bast, or just about any animal for someone with

animal empathy). In this case, it is also important to consider whether the familiar is a natural animal, a magical animal, or has a spiritual or divine nature, as this will affect its motivations and likely powers.

Demonic Familiars

A demonic familiar is a very special case of familiar, because unlike other forms of familiar it is fundamentally hostile to the character. As such, a demonic familiar represents a special challenge for both the GM and the player, and the GM would be well within his rights to forbid demonic familiars to PCs. A character generally acquires a demonic familiar in one of two ways: either he makes a bargain, in which case the familiar's goals are to convince the mage and anyone else convenient to damn himself, make life miserable for as many people as possible, and then arrange for the mage to die once he's thoroughly damned, or he places some sort of magical compulsion on the familiar, in which case the familiar's goals are freeing itself, killing the mage, and generally causing as much havoc as possible. The GM should keep a secret character sheet for the familiar, giving it experience as it accomplishes its goals. A character who dies while linked to a demonic familiar is probably damned -- roll a contest of wills, counting good behavior as levels of strong will, evil behavior as weak will. Due to the nature of the familiar link, demonic familiars frequently cannot be banished.

Buying a Familiar

The first part of buying a familiar is convincing the GM to let you have one. During character creation, this is usually just a matter of paying for the familiar; later the GM may require going to some effort to acquire the familiar, as well as paying points. The GM should never actually require buying a familiar, though he may certainly offer opportunities.

Methods for acquiring familiars vary widely, and are left up to the GM -- for magical familiars a roll on Thaumatology or Occultism will reveal a method, for divine familiars it's usually up to the deity's whim, for exotic animals it's generally a matter of training. In all cases there is a fairly substantial amount of luck involved. For animal familiars, it is somewhat traditional to raise them from infants; while most animals mature faster than humans, it will usually be a matter of months before a familiar becomes useful at all, and a year or more for the familiar to reach full growth. This has the advantage that the familiar can be initially fairly cheap, and then cost more points as it grows into adulthood. Once adult, a familiar usually does not age any faster than its master.

Paying for a Familiar

A familiar is bought as a package of other advantages and disadvantages. Most of these advantages are just standard *GURPS* advantages and disadvantages, with a limitation to reflect the fact that they are dependent on the familiar, and do not work without the familiar. In principle essentially any advantage can be granted by the right familiar, but in practice only a few are common.

Advantages Related to Spellcasting

Assist Ritual   10 points

The familiar may join its master in all forms of ritual magic; this includes enchanting. It counts as a second mage, with skill identical to its master. This advantage does not permit the familiar to lead a circle or join any circle the master is not in, though it can still do so if it would normally be able to. The familiar must have magery to have this advantage.

Assist Concentration   5 points

Any time the mage fails a concentration roll, the familiar may make a concentration roll of its own to maintain focus. This does not apply if the mage would not be permitted to make a roll.

Beast Gifts   **variable**

The mage can gradually acquire certain innate traits of the familiar, such as advantages, high attributes, and the like. Occasionally this also result in disadvantages such as bestial or stress atavism.

Borrow Form   **5 points**

The mage can shapeshift into the form of the familiar; treat as the shapeshift spell. Cost is usually 6 to cast, 2 to maintain, though some familiars might be more.

Boost Magery   **variable**

The familiar gives its master a higher level of magery; cost is equal to the difference in cost between normal and boosted magery. You should be careful to note spells which have the higher level of magery as a direct or indirect prerequisite, since they can only be cast with the assistance of the familiar. The GM may wish to require you to learn prerequisite spells at 12 without the assistance of the familiar. In some worlds, this might be the only way to become a mage. The familiar must have as many levels of magery as it grants (but a magery-1 familiar can boost its master from magery 2 to 3).

Boost Psi   **variable**

As per boost magery, but applies to psionic abilities instead.

Innate Spells   **by cost of spell**

Some familiars can grant their masters magical abilities in the form of spells rather than advantages. These spells should generally correspond directly to innate abilities of the familiar.

Share ST   **3 per point of fatigue**

The mage may make use of his ally's fatigue as if it were his own. The familiar may also buy this advantage, allowing it to make use of its master's fatigue. The familiar may choose not to let you use its fatigue. Note that familiars with less than 6 fatigue require 60/fatigue minutes to recover a point of fatigue.

Spell Sustaining   **10 points**

The familiar can maintain spells for the mage; treat as per lend spell. Transferring a spell to the familiar requires a turn of concentration, and requires the familiar to make an IQ+Magery roll at -1 per spell it is already maintaining (-3 per spell requiring concentration). The familiar must have magery.

Advantages Related to Your Link With the Familiar

Most mages have some sort of arcane link to their familiar; the GM may require some minimum level of link. Unless the familiar can talk, some form of link is generally mandatory.

Empathic Link   **5 points**

Allows the mage to sense his familiar's emotional state; this will also allow knowing when the familiar is injured or in pain, but is generally not useful for communication. The familiar should also buy this advantage, for equivalent awareness of the mage. Always active.

Health Link   **3 per hit points**

Allows the mage to transfer wounds to his familiar; cost is per hit point of the familiar. Like Share ST, the familiar can refuse to accept the injury. The familiar may buy this advantage to transfer wounds to its master.

Sense Link   5 points

Allows the mage to perceive through his familiar's senses, per the spell Rider Within. Requires three turns of concentration and two fatigue to activate. +1 point for -1 fatigue cost, +1 point for -1 turn to activate.

Spellcasting Link   5 or 10 points

For 5 points, the mage can cast spells on his familiar as if he were touching his familiar. For 10 points, the mage can cast spells through his familiar, using range for the familiar; note that this is blind casting without a sense link. The familiar can refuse to permit the mage to cast through the link. The familiar may also buy this advantage to cast spells through the mage.

Telepathic Link   5 or 10 points

Allows the mage to communicate telepathically with his familiar, per the spell. For five points, it requires one fatigue and a turn to activate, counts as a spell on, and must be maintained. For 10 points, it is always active and does not count as a spell on.

The Familiar as an Ally

Aside from any advantages a familiar might grant, a familiar normally also counts as an ally or dependent. If you do not want to take the penalties associated with putting a dependent in danger, treat the base ally cost as 1 for negative point value, 2 for 0-24 points, 3 for 25-49 points, 4 for 50-74 points, and normal for higher ally point values. Familiars are usually better than 9- availability as allies; if you want a familiar who is absolutely always available, treat as a x4 frequency multiplier. A familiar not being present does not necessarily prevent use of its powers; take limited availability (below) to reflect that. Demonic allies are considered to be unwilling allies, at half normal cost.

Limitations on Familiar Advantages

The main difference between an advantage granted by a familiar and a natural advantage is that it's connected to the familiar, and may thus not always be present. At the GMs option, these limitations may be bought off, as the increased abilities become innate.

Dependent on Familiar   -10%

This power is lost if your familiar dies. At GMs option, also applies if familiar is in another dimension, time, or solar system. You can't take this limitation on link advantages, they're already automatically limited. Can be combined with any of the below limitations; required for anything other than mana-dependent. At the GMs discretion, up to half the points in abilities bought this way may be spent to obtain a new familiar if the old one dies.

Contingent on Behavior   Variable

Your familiar can, and will, deny you use of its powers if you misbehave. Limitation value is 2% times the value of an equivalent vow, or the actual cost of such a vow, whichever is less. You cannot take this limitation for a vow you already have. Half value if the ally can only refuse permission to use powers by triggering limited range or maintenance requirements. This is most common for divine allies.

Fickle Familiar   Variable

Your familiar must be convinced to help you. Treat identically to the fickle disadvantage; if the fickleness roll fails, the familiar is unhelpful. Bribery may increase the reliability of a fickle familiar. This is not precisely the same as limited availability; your familiar can be present and still not very helpful.

Limited Availability   **Variable**

The power is not always available. -5% if only available 15-, -10% if available 12-, -25% if available 9-, -50% if available 6-. How often this roll is made depends on why the power is limited availability. You may link this limitation to the appearance roll for the familiar, but the rolls need not actually be the same -- even if your tomcat familiar only actually shows up on 9-, its probably within a mile on 15-.

Limited Range   **Variable**

Power only works if familiar is within a certain range. -5% for 1,000 miles, -10% for 100 miles, -15% for 10 miles, -20% for 1 mile, -25% for 100 yards, -30% for 10 yards, -35% for 1 yard, -40% for touch only. Usually not purchased on link advantages.

Mana-Dependent   **-10%**

This advantage does not work in a no mana zone, or if a no mana zone lies between you and your familiar. This value should change in a setting where mana is particularly common or rare. The GM should ban this for advantages which normally do not operate in a no mana zone, such as magery.

Maintenance Required   **Variable**

Your familiar need not be in range to sustain the power, but you need to be regularly in contact with your familiar to maintain your powers. -5% for one month, -10% for one week, -15% for one day, -20% for one hour, -25% for one minute. Cannot be taken as along with limited range; just use the greater limitation. Add an additional -5% if this maintenance causes a wound (1 HT, cannot be healed except by normal daily healing).

Disadvantages Associated with Familiars

There are also a number of traditional disadvantages associated with familiars. Any limitations which apply to familiar advantages may also be applied to familiar disadvantages. The GM may choose not to count familiar-related disadvantages against the normal disad limit.

Infectious Empathic Link   **-5 points**

The mage is aware of the familiar's emotions, per empathic link -- but will also feel those emotions, and may be required to make a will roll to avoid acting on them.

Pain Link   **-10 points**

The mage feels his familiar's injuries, and takes shock and stunning penalties based on wounds to his familiar; high pain threshold does not help against this damage. If the familiar is killed, the mage is automatically stunned, and must make a fright check at -10.

Reversed Spellcasting Link   **-10 points**

Spells can be cast on you through your familiar, based on range to the familiar. Spells which cannot normally be resisted can be resisted when cast in this way, resisting with HT. Missile and jet spells cannot be cast across the link. It is possible to have special vulnerability to spells cast in this way, add -1 point per level of magic susceptibility.

Reciprocal Wounds   -15 points

Like pain link, but worse; damage taken by the familiar is also taken by the mage. If the familiar is killed, the mage must roll vs HT to avoid dying as well. Cannot be taken with health link. This is the same as "the mage suffers his familiar's wounds," from *Magic*.

Witch's Teat   -1 point

Some familiars have a dependency on their master's blood; a witch's teat is the mark left where the familiar feeds. It has a somewhat distinctive appearance, and is immune to pain. If in a particularly obvious position, this might be a 5-point unnatural feature.

Character Sheets for Familiars

Most mundane animals really aren't enough points to cost much as an ally. However, supernatural creatures and other exceptional familiars might be. In addition to any advantages associated with their form, magical familiars should take magery, and most familiars have the same link advantages as their masters. The stats below assume that the process of becoming a familiar boosts IQ to human levels; if this is not true simply buy IQ down to 7, add 3 levels of alertness, bestial, uneducated, and primitive TL0, and usually add at least two levels of short lifespan. This saves 40+ points for a TL 3 setting, and the GM may choose not to count this against disadvantage limits.

New Advantages and Disadvantages for Familiars

Small   10 points/level

This creature is unusually small; size modifier is -1 or less. Each level gives -1 to see or attack the creature, +1 DX for dealing with small objects at touch range, halves life support requirements, halves damage from falls, and generally allows any other actions the GM feels that being small would help with. The creature may still take disadvantages related to being small.

Small Claws   5/10/15 points

The creature has claws which do damage based on the bite table rather than on the thrust table. 5 points for crushing, 10 for cutting, 15 for impaling. This is a slightly modified version of the teeth advantage, with +5 cost for the slightly greater reach and not endangering the head.

Dependency, Master   Variable

Familiars can be dependent on contact with their masters for one reason or another. This is basically a normal dependency; treat contact with the master as a common substance. If it actually needs to drink its master's blood, treat as occasional. Animal familiars may replace the damage with 1 point of IQ loss; once IQ drops to 7 the familiar becomes nonsentient and loses all supernatural abilities.

Typical Mundane Animals

Here are a few typical mundane animals as familiars, with complete character sheets. Many familiars will have attributes at the high end of normal, though it is also moderately common for familiars to be fat and out of shape. Most familiars should also have magery, but that is not included in the template.

Cat
(-5 points)

A typical housecat. A black cat would be likely to have Magery-2 with an innate "curse" spell, the Jinx disadvantage, or both, and a bad reputation.

Attributes: ST 3 DX 14 IQ 10 HT 13/3. (-35 total)
Speed 6.5, Move 13, Dodge 7, PD/DR 0/0, Claw/Bite 1d-4 cut.

Advantages" Alertness +2(10), Catfall (10), Small Cutting Claws (10), Combat Reflexes (15), Four Legs(5), Fur(1), Increased Running x2 (10), Night Vision(10), Perfect Balance (15), Sharp Teeth (5), Skill Bonus: +3 stealth(4), Small (size -3)(30). (115 total)

Disadvantages: No Fine Manipulators(-30), Horizontal (-10), Inconvenient Size (small) (-15), Mute (-25), Sleepy (50%)(-10), Social Stigma: Property (-10). (-100 total)

Skills: Acrobatics(1), Brawling(1), Climbing(1), Jumping(1), Stealth(1)

Spells Granted: balance, night vision, slow fall.

Horse
(103 points)

A good-sized horse; horse allies generally seem to be cavalry horses or warhorses. ST includes -40% for no fine manipulators. This is a fairly expensive template, but note that horses are prone to being basically smart animals.

Attributes: ST 40 DX 9 IQ 10 HT 15. (158 total)
Speed 6, Move 15, Dodge 6, PD/DR 0/0, Bite 2d Cr, Kick 4d+1 Cr.

Advantages: Alertness +2(10), Four Legs (5), Increased Running x2.5 (15) (45 total)

Disadvantages: No Fine Manipulators(-30), Horizontal (-10), Inconvenient Size (large) (-10), Mute (-25), Social Stigma: Property (-10). (-85 total)

Owl
(-25 points)

A large owl, such as a great horned owl. Most small owls will have ST 1. An owl's attack dive is basically an all-out attack for damage, but gains +1 damage due to velocity.

Attributes: ST 2 DX 14 IQ 10 HT 12/5. (-40 total)
Speed 6.5, Move 3/13F, Dodge 7/9F, PD/DR 0/0, Claws/Bite 1d-5

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2(4), Alertness +2(10), Small Cutting Claws (10), Combat Reflexes (15), Feathers (1), Night Vision (10), Sharp Teeth (5), Skill Bonus: +3 stealth (4), Small (size -3) (30), Winged Flight (30) (119 points)

Disadvantages: One Fine Manipulator (-10), Poor Manipulators (-10), Poor Day Vision (-10), Inconvenient Size (small) (-15), Mute (-25), Sleepy (50%)(-10), Social Stigma: Property (-10), Reduced Ground Move -3 (-15) (-105 total)

Skills: Stealth (1)

Spells Granted: night vision, mage-stealth

Typical Supernatural Animals

Minidragon
(35 points)

There's a lot of variation on stats for miniature dragons; this one is in the 20 lb range, with a poisonous bite. In most cases there should be a telepathic or empathic link to the familiar.

Attributes: ST 5 DX 13 IQ 10 HT 13/5 (-30 total)
Speed 6.5, Move 4/13F, Dodge 6/8F, PD/DR 1/0, Claw/Bite 1d-4 Ct.

Advantages: Magery 1 (15), Small -2 (20), Small Cutting Claws (10), Scales PD1/DR0 (25), Sharp Teeth (5), Extra Limb (Tail, No Attack, Extra Flex) (10), Winged Flight (30), Poison (15) (130 total)

Disadvantages: Inconvenient Size (-15), Social Stigma: Pet (-10), Dependency: Mana, Daily (-15), Mute (-25), Reduced Running -2 (-10). (-75 total)

Imp
(55 points)

A small but fairly compact imp, around 15 lb and 18" tall. Note that its vulnerability applies even against nondamaging attacks (holy water does 1d against DR 5) and applies to attacks of magical beings (so imps can hurt one another...barely) but does not apply against spells. The compulsion: evil can be replaced by other 'evil' disadvantages for a particular imp.

Attributes: ST 5 DX 13 IQ 13 HT 13/5 (10 total)
Speed 6.5, Move 6, Dodge 7, PD/DR 1/5, Claw/Bite 1d-4 Ct.

Advantages: Magery 3 (35), Literacy (10), Small-3 (30), Small Cutting Claws (10), PD 1 (25), DR 5 (15), Sharp Teeth (5), Poison (15), Extra Limb (Tail, No Attack, Extra Flexibility) (10), Immunity to Poison (15), Immunity to Disease (10), Strong Will +10, Only vs. Supernatural Abilities that Affect the Mind (-50%; 20), Extra Fatigue-5 (15) (215 total) **Disadvantages:** Vulnerable, Magic/Holy Weapons/Items, 1d (-10), Dependency: Mana, Constant (-25), Dependency: Master's Blood, Weekly (-10), Dread (Holy Items or Holy Ground, -20), Unliving (-50), Inconvenient Size (-15), Bad Reputation -4(-20), Compulsion: Evil (-30). (-180 points) **Innate Spells:** Gift of Tongues-15 (4), Gift of Letters-15 (4), Suggestion-15 (2).

Familiars as Characters

It's certainly possible to play a familiar as a PC, though it would be unusual for a non-demonic familiar to be at the point level of a typical PC, and demonic familiars are generally not advised as characters. A familiar to an NPC mage should take the mage as a patron, and a duty to that mage. A familiar to another PC should handle this through roleplaying, and note that disadvantages such as limited availability, contingent on behavior, and fickle are usually inappropriate. On the plus side, PCs need never pay for other PCs as allies.

Pyramid Pick

Big Eyes, Small Mouth RPG (Second Edition)

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by David L. Pulver and Mark C. MacKinnon

288 pages (6"x9" full color), $29.95 U.S. ($39.95 Can)

When it was released in 1998, *Big Eyes, Small Mouths* made waves in anime gaming for its simple, streamlined design and versatile mechanics. The Second Edition is better. Much better. In fact, I'd argue it's not just for anime anymore.

To anyone familiar with the First Edition of *BESM*, the Second Edition is a remarkable change. The First Edition was only 96 pages and some 16,000 words, while the Second Edition is over 280 pages and 100,000 words. But fear not, those extra pages are not just filler. Second Edition *BESM* incorporates much of the material previously published in *Big Robots, Cool Starships* along with some concepts from other Guardians of Order titles.

This book is a high-quality product with exceptional production values. The 288 pages are color-printed throughout, and the design uses that color to good effect, showing off the anime-styled artwork one would expect. The art is very good, with only a few real clunkers, and covers a wide variety of anime styles without looking disjointed or busy.

The use of color doesn't stop with the artwork. *BESM* also make good use of color to highlight information tables (green), examples (blue), and notes (red). The notes are especially significant because they highlight changes from First Edition, and usually explain the rationale behind those decisions.

But enough about appearance. What about substance?

BESM sets itself a daunting task; giving players the option of gaming almost any anime genre, from high-powered, mecha-based action to silly (or not-so-silly) teenage romances, with fantasy adventure, pocket monster collectors, and sports teams tossed in for good measure.

Remarkably, it succeeds.

BESM is based on GoO's Tri-Stat system, also used in their licensed game settings. The rules are light, but flexible. They have a strong cinematic bias (the damage rules note that mortally wounded characters "will die within an appropriately dramatic period of time," for example) but leave plenty of room for Game Masters to set the degree of detail required.

As the name implies, Tri-Stat characters have three Statistics (Stats): Body, Mind, and Soul. These range from 1 ("Completely and Utterly Useless") to 12 ("Best in the Universe."); normal humans average 4. These define a character's abilities in the broadest possible terms.

Adding more detail, there are dozens of possible Attributes to represent special abilities. This is where the flexibility of the system really starts to show up. Attributes cover the whole gamut of possibilities from mundane (Appearance) to over the top (Gun Bunny) to downright silly (Flunkies). Each Attribute has six levels and often has several optional special abilities.

Character creation follows the now-familiar pattern of using points to buy Statistics, and Attributes, with the option of getting extra points by taking Defects. In a departure from First Edition, Second Edition *BESM* uses a single pool of points for both Statistics and Attributes and recommends giving each character a fixed number of points depending on expected the power-level of the game. (The First Edition system of separate pools for Statistics and Attributes is included as an option.)

There is an optional, but highly recommended, Skill system as well. Skills are bought from a separate pool of points (certain Attributes or Defects can change the number of skill points). Each skill also has optional specializations if you really need that level of detail. One intriguing feature is a table of suggested costs for the various skills in different settings. Important skills -- Piloting in a Space opera styled game or Cooking in a Teenage Romance game -- are more expensive while less important skills are cheaper. This makes it easy to customize the system for the style of play you want.

As mentioned, *BESM* now incorporates much of the information in David Pulver's earlier GoO work, ***Big Robots, Cool Starships***. That means that you can build mecha using much the same system used to build characters. In this case, mecha is used in its most generic sense; *BESM* will let you design anything from a motorbike to a space-going superbattleship.

The game mechanics are very simple. Almost everything is decided on a single 2d6 roll against one of the three Stats or the character's combat abilities, with modifiers for Skills, Abilities, and difficulty. The amount by which the roll is made determines s the degree of success in a simple linear fashion.

Optional rules cover more detailed movement, fancy combat techniques, mental battles, and so forth. A whole page is devoted to how to blow up building, cities, and (most importantly) planets. What's not to like here?

In addition to the obligatory, but well-done "What is a Role-Playing Game?" section, Chapter 1 contains an introduction to *BESM*, a (very) brief history of anime with comments on a dozen or so of the most popular anime genres, and some notes on changes from First Edition *BESM*.

Chapter 2 focuses on character creation, including "Normal" attributes, defects, and skills (optional, though I would highly recommend them). Somewhat awkwardly, Special Attributes and Defects, mainly paranormal or mecha-related, are separated in Chapter 3, though they are also listed (but not described) in Chapter 2 as well. It might have been better to split out the Skills section as a separate chapter and keep all the attributes together, but it's only minor inconvenience.

Chapter 4 covers basic game mechanics, complete with a simple flow-chart to keep track of combat. (It's not really necessary -- there is a grand total of seven boxes on the chart -- but it is a nice summary.) Chapter 5 includes expanded rules primarily of use for combat situations, including the aforementioned planet-busting rules.

The last chapter, Chapter 6, is the heart of the book, in my opinion. It promises information on "Role-Playing in an anime World" and delivers. There is good guidance for GMs on designing a campaign setting. Time periods, themes, concepts and several campaign "seeds" are given, along with advice on how to flesh out the game. The "fan service section" is especially useful, giving hints on how to give a game a distinctly anime feel, but much of the advice is appropriate for anyone developing a new game setting.

Rounding out this package is an extensive reference section with bibliography, filmography, and other information; several sample characters; and a detailed index.

There are some small glitches: the example space fighter for the "Own a Big Mecha" attribute appears to have been written using ***Big Robots, Cool Starships***, and some of the attributes and options used are not exactly the same as in *BESM*. However, it was a relatively simple matter to discover that "Armour" should be "Heavy Armour" and move on from there. Splitting the Attributes and Defects in separate chapters is slightly awkward, but works fine once you get used to it.

With all this going for it, ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth*** is almost a must-buy for anyone interested in anime gaming. But its

appeal should not be limited to anime. As it stands, **BESM** is also just fine for all sorts of martial arts or action gaming. It would need only minor tweaks to be adaptable to the "Golden Age" Pulp action or Cliffhanger-style game. (For mecha, substitute planes, fast cars, motorcycles, etc.) With some more substantive changes you have a near-perfect "Four-Color" supers game (Add a few special Attributes to cover more superpowers and off you go).

If you are looking for a simple, flexible system for almost any sort of cinematic gaming, you owe it to yourself to give Second Edition **Big Eyes, Small Mouth** a look.

-- Thomas Schoene

Pyramid Review

Gear Krieg

Published by [Dream Pod Nine](#)

Written by David Graham and Richard Meaden

128 pages, $24.95 hardcover

World War II and alternate history have always had a lot in common. Historical wargames are all about exploring different outcomes of WWII battles, and the most compelling and popular alternate history novels have often centered on the question, "What if Hitler had won?" That close association makes Dream Pod Nine's combination of World War II and mecha wargaming seem perfectly logical. It's a natural fit -- the only surprising part is that nobody has ever thought of it before.

In *Gear Krieg*, pulp superscience is alive and well, and living in the 1940s. Armored "Walkers" stomp through the forests of Europe and the jungles of the Pacific, dodging rocket planes and energy cannons as they pour down fire on tanks and infantry squads. The changes in military history are subtle -- panzers and carriers are still crucial weapons in this world -- but the mechs add a new dimension to classic World War II combat situations.

Dream Pod Nine has developed a convincing world for the walkers. The first third of the book is devoted to the background, presenting the first three years of the war in detail and showing the roles that mechs have played in the France, Crete, the Philippines and many other important battlegrounds. They certainly know their history. Most of what they present really happened, and an unwary reader might just wonder if there really were "supertanks" roaming the Ukraine. The changes are subtle and carefully placed, and Dream Pod Nine has even taken time to explore little-known conflicts in the Middle East.

Gear Krieg's background is atmospheric enough that it would probably make a fascinating roleplaying game. *Gear Krieg* is a wargame, though, and the game doesn't quite live up to the setting yet. *Gear Krieg* uses the same Silhouette system as Dream Pod Nine's popular *Heavy Gear* and *Jovian Chronicles* games. It's fast and easy, and works smoothly for battles of 20-40 individual units.

However, there's a problem. *Gear Krieg* apparently uses the same vehicle construction system as the other Silhouette games, but the WWII mechs are built on much smaller point values than the gears of *Heavy Gear* and the *Jovian Chronicles*. They've been scaled back to reflect the much less advanced technology of the 1940s. The walkers of *Gear Krieg* are built on 30 to 50 points, while *Heavy Gear* and *Jovian Chronicles* vehicles are built on hundreds or thousands of points. *Gear Krieg* walkers have less armor, guns with shorter ranges, and smaller damage modifiers.

Size isn't everything, of course. But the Silhouette system becomes grainy at this low end of the scale. The gun ranges are so short and the movement rates so slow that battles between walkers become stop-and-go affairs of trying to get close enough to shoot. There also seems to be no middle ground in damage resolution. In our test battles, hits would do either inconsequential damage or blow the mech to oblivion.

The system works more smoothly with tanks, but the tanks are built on 70-120 points and have significantly better armor, weapon ranges and damage modifiers. The more powerful walkers -- mainly the ones listed as coming into service in 1941 -- also have better weapon ranges, but the walkers of 1939 and 1940 aren't much fun to play.

That may simply be part of Dream Pod Nine's plan. The alternate history of *Gear Krieg* pauses at the end of 1941, commonly considered the height of the Axis power, and it's clear that the story of World War II will continue in later supplements. There are several hints that radically improved technology will appear as the war goes on, which means

the mechs we see in the basic book will be followed by more capable and flexible machines.

Following the progress of tactics and technology through the entire war could be fascinating -- but if playing the walkers of the early war is dull, there may not be many fans looking forward to doing battle in 1942.

--Chris Aylott

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Pyramid Review

The Sunless Citadel (for D&D)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Bruce R. Cordell

32 pages, $9.95

The first adventure for *D&D 3rd Edition*, *The Sunless Citadel* is designed to
challenge four 1st level characters. Unlike some adventures, this one encourages the
GM to award the players experience to advance levels during game play so that
they are powerful enough to handle latter encounters. Briefly touching on preparation, Bruce Cordell advises which
parts of the *DMG* and *Player's Handbook* to look over; this is very useful for new players and GMs. The adventure
background may not be immediately learned by players, but is there for eventual discovery.

More important, though, are the character hooks. While the standard one is there -- e.g. "The Sunless Citadel is a local
legend . . . " -- there are two other options. While being contracted is another standard adventuring motive, the last one,
solving a mystery (in this case the players are looking to discover where goblins get a special type of fruit, and how
they manage, year after year to successfully steal the growing trees of that fruit) is often under-used.

The action takes place in the small town of Oakhurst. Using the same format as found in the *D&D Gazetteer*, the town
is broken down to rows that are easy to read in a glance. You can see the population, authority figures, important
characters, and notes. The introduction of NPC classes is first used here, with warriors and barkeeps making up a good
portion of the classed townspeople. It's important to note that Oakhurst isn't detailed outside of that break down, and
while the map is nice, it's also too small to use Oakhurst as an adventuring local for more than this adventure without
the GM putting in some work.

The maps are well done, and by placing them on the inner side of the cover, Wizards of the Coast manages to save
space. Hopefully all future *d20* products will follow this lead. It's bad enough that they have to suffer the *d20* license
which takes up precious space; they can at least use those covers for something other than binding.

Most encounters are listed by having the word Creature spelled out in bold, with the encounter level, abbreviated *el*,
next to it. At the bottom of this description -- which can include tactics or description -- are listed the names and hit
points of the creature. There is a master stat list in the back of the adventure so space is saved by not repeating
information. Many of the encounters revolve around two classic *D&D* monsters: kobolds and goblins. Those seeking
more than a simple hack-feast can bargain with the kobolds, but the goblins have no interest outside of slaying the
party. The unique creature in this adventure, twig blights, are featured on the cover. A few other monster types sneak
in here: bugbears, a weakened troll, and even a small white dragon. Those GMs looking for traps will find more than a
few here, but nothing too inventive or powerful. One of the interesting things about bargaining with the kobolds is how
experience points are handled. Players earn xp as if they had defeated the kobolds, but if they break the agreements, or
go rogue, they earn the combat xp but lose the negotiation xp.

The maps are numbered clearly, and the encounters follow suit. Most rooms have two parts, one with a general
description and a grayed out area to read to the players. Sidebars feature additional information that may not be
appropriate for players knowledge, like the overview of the Sunless Citadel, while other information, includes types of
doors, light sources, and ventilation found in the Sunless Citadel. There are two levels to this adventure: the Fortress
Level and the more sinister Grove Level.

One of the things I'm glad is that this adventure isn't the "first" in a series. There are no hints as to this adventure being merely a part of a greater book, or it being the first chapter in a novel. When the adventure is finished, there are options for continuing to use the twig blights as a new menace, but the adventure is over.

The interior art is solid and stands up to WotC's standards. For the most part is it limited to one corner, where the art is boxed in to match the column's size. A few illustrations take up two columns worth of space. There are numerous pages without illustration, which allows the adventure more room to breathe.

One of the things that I disagree with WotC is that the back of the Sunless Citadel states you need the ***Monster Manual*** to play. When the adventure first came out that book was not available. The abbreviated statistics at the end of the book will do in a pinch, and eager GMs who've already DMed other adventures for ***D&D***, like ***Three Days to Kill***, ***Death in Freeport***, or numerous on-line adventures, should have no problem with this adventure.

At $9.95, though, the adventure is still too expensive while WotC produces *Dungeon Magazine*. While it's true that the adventurers in *Dungeon Magazine* are shorter, the value per adventure is higher. Still, for ***D&D***'s first adventure for the new edition, it's better than ***Three Days to Kill***, and equal to, if not superior than, ***Death in Freeport***. The follow up adventures will determine the overall impact.

--Joe G. Kushner

Gabriel

An Odd Prophet for GURPS Space/Aliens

by K. David Ladage

Art by David Lynch and colored by Jeremy Zauder

ST: 8 [0]
DX: 11 [0]
IQ: 12 [20]
HT: 7 [0]

Speed: 4.5 **Move:** 4
Dodge: 4 **Block:** N/A **Parry:** N/A

Point Total: 50

Race: Truul (page A104) [-4] (ST: -2 [-15], DX: +1 [10], HT: -3 [-20], Cultural Adaptability [25], Passive Defense (+1) [25], Language Talent (+3) [6], Recovery [10], Status (-1) [-5], Slave Mentality [-40])

Advantages: Very Blessed [20]

Disadvantages: Voices (2) Angelic [-10]

Quirks: Never smiles, Rarely speaks

Skills: Accounting-12 [4], Bard-16 [10], Computer Operation/TL-12 [1], Detect Lies-10 [1], Philosophy-12 [4], Savoir-Faire-13 [2]

Languages: Galactic-12 (Native) [0], Latin-14 [1], Greek-14 [1]

Description

Gabriel is about 45 years old. He is 3 11" tall and weighs 75 pounds. He has faint blue skin and red-brown hair cut very short. He is generally seen wearing clothing suitable for a Priest.

Story

Six years ago, Pastor Jason Alexander McVey was part of a failed survey/religious mission to the planet of Monolith (SAT4/46). On this trip, Monsignor McVey met Scrub, a Truul employed by the ship s cook. He could see that Scrub was being severely mistreated and so by the end of the mission, convinced the old cook to sell him.

When Pastor McVey returned home, the Church was not pleased to see him with a slave. However, after some convincing and explanation, Scrub was made the property of the Church under the guise of being given Sanctuary. It was not long before he was a familiar face. He was given a set of regular duties in addition to acting as a messenger for the Church Officials -- hence his new name, Gabriel.

Two years ago, Pastor McVey was given the opportunity to lead another mission to Monolith. Gabriel went to him with tears in his eyes. Begging him not to leave, Gabriel told him that he would never reach Monolith alive. This was

very unusual talk coming from Gabriel (or any Truul), but Pastor McVey wrote this off as over-attachment and accepted the mission. An accident destroyed his ship and all aboard perished.

Since then, Gabriel has made over twenty predictions with uncanny accuracy. Each time he describes his predictions, his speech becomes very poetic. The Church has so far managed to keep this under wraps. Six Church Officials were assigned to study Gabriel and they have discovered that he receives his information through some sort of Angelic Voices. Skepticism is running high in the official Church channels. Some are even getting a little paranoid around him.

Quotes

- "Message for you, sir."
- "I m sorry to hear about your wife. I m sorry, you didn't know, did you?"

Adventure Seeds

- The PCs are approached by a man who warns them about how something they are about to do is going to go horribly wrong. When questioned, the man explains that he is a Man of the Cloth and that he cannot reveal his sources.
- Word of Gabriel and his abilities has leaked, and he has been kidnapped (possibly by the PCs . . .)
- Gabriel has accepted his "Voices" as his new master and escapes from the Church! The Church wants him back, and so they employ the PCs to track him down and capture him. When the PCs finally catch up to him, he has formed his own Church with a group of fanatical Truul followers.

Variations

- Change "Voices (2) Angelic " to "Voices (3)." In this variation, Gabriel is being given *evil* instructions from his inner voices. The death of Pastor McVey may even have been sabotage that Gabriel was ordered to perform.
- In a campaign where "Very Blessed" does not fit, replace it with ESP (8) [16] (Precognition Only) and Precognition-12 [4].
- The "voices" that Gabriel is hearing are actually the projected thoughts of a powerful Telepath! The "predictions" may or may not be true (they could be staged, or the Telepath could have precognition). Remove Very Blessed. Total point cost becomes 30 points. The GM can decide just what the intentions of the Telepath are . . .

Something Less Than God

by Spike Y Jones

(with thanks to Edmund Shaw and Jon Rowe)

Art by Dan Smith

Ever since I started roleplaying, I've been hearing the truisms "The GM is God" and "The GM's word is law." And since I've spent most of my roleplaying time GMing, it's been easy for me to go along with these sayings, enjoying the power and freedom it entailed . . . until I played in games with other GMs who espoused that same philosophy, which forced a bit of enlightenment on me.

Game Masters are indeed powerful. They control every aspect of the game and the game world . . . except the players and their characters.

The World

It's the privilege and power of the GM to create (or buy) and then run the game world. Every detail is his purview: the movements of the planets, the occurrence of earthquakes, volcanos, locust swarms, plagues, etc.

But the GM's control isn't unlimited. In many cases, he delegates some of his decision-making powers to an unseen agent: the creator of the RPG he's running. Every time he uses a Weather Table or reads out a default description of an average day on the game world, he's deferring to the judgement of someone else.

The players may not like the weather that their characters have to weather, but their griping isn't likely to make it change. Still, if they point-out the inconsistency of rainbows appearing on a rainless day, or the strangeness of a "bright summer monsoon," the GM may be forced to consider a retraction, or to concoct some special circumstances (such as the whim of a storm-god) to justify the strangeness.

Creating an interesting campaign world isn't the purpose of an RPG; running adventures in that world is. So if interesting inanimate bits of the game world threaten to derail adventures, the GM should modify the game world to accommodate these other concerns instead of ruling that the game world, once set to paper, is an unchanging creation. Of course, such changes should take place quietly and out of sight of the PCs in order to prevent problems with consistency ("Hey, wasn't there a mountain range here the last time we passed through?"), but the GM has to remember to be flexible and attentive to the management of his world.

Active vs. Passive

The player characters are the central actors of the campaign. They may not be the most powerful or influential characters around, but they are the focal point of the story as it follows their interactions with the other characters of

the campaign, not those of the movers and shakers. As far as the players are concerned, what their PCs do and what happens to them is far more important than the rest of the campaign world combined.

Which doesn't mean that the PCs have to be destined to triumph in the end; the campaign story can be a comedy in which circumstances always contrive to rob them of their glory, or a tragedy in which they fail in their quest. But whatever the outcome, the narrative follows the lives of the PCs, no matter where the course of outside events goes.

For example, in a *Star Wars* campaign, all the players know who will eventually lead the Rebellion to victory, but that doesn't mean that the GM's adventures should be replays of the movies with the PCs as spectators watching Han, Luke, Leia, and Chewie do all the work. There are lots of other regions of the Empire that need to be cleansed of evil, there can be many more plots that need to be foiled (maybe there were really three Death Stars, or more!) before the movie characters can achieve their victory, and even after Vader is eliminated there will be pockets of Imperial power to clean out. Maybe the PCs can cross trails with the movie characters from time to time, but in their own adventures it must be the players characters who are the stars.

As a result, the characters controlled by the players should seem more active than those run by the GM. For the sake of verisimilitude, NPCs should be run as if they were active characters with lives of their own, but those lives should never become the point about which the action revolves. Even the central villain in the story spends most of his time "off camera," appearing only when the actions of the heroes "bring the camera to him," whether this occurs because they move to where he is or whether they remain stationary and he comes to them.

Well run minor NPCs don't sit around dungeons waiting for the PCs to wander in and "activate" them; they carry out their own lives without reference to the PCs, and if a band of adventurers crosses their paths, they react to the intrusion.

Major NPCs are just as active as the PCs, and since they're motivated to courses of action that are likely to enhance, disrupt or otherwise affect the lives of the PCs, it is their activity which forces the player characters to react. But for all their ability to initiate adventures, a GM should take care to ensure that the NPCs' actions don't pull the PCs through the story like dogs on leashes. The villain provides the impetus and the opposition, other non-player characters provide assistance, plot-twists, or even just local color, but none of these should also tell the story.

The GM should also take care not to identify too much with "his" characters. Even when they're not cannon-fodder, destined to die as nameless obstacles standing between the PCs and their goal, the NPCs are all essentially expendable. If it comes down to a conflict between the enjoyment of the players and the continuation of the actions, plans, or lives of even the most significant or treasured of NPCs, the GM who plays NPCs as his own personal player characters will soon find himself running a solo game.

Consistency

Whether the setting is medieval fantasy, superheroic modern age, or futuristic space opera, the players are going to have to perform a paradoxical task in order to enjoy the game: they're going to have to believe in the normalcy of the setting before they can get excited about its fantastic features. If the setting doesn't provide a certain base reality that the players can feel comfortable with, they won't have any idea what their characters can accomplish, and just won't try.

The campaign world has to be designed with these elements in it. There have to be physical laws in operation that are described to the players before they take actions based on unwarranted assumptions. If gravity isn't going to operate in the normal Newtonian way, this is something the GM should tell the players, as this is something that the PCs would know about through life-experience (unless they've come from some place with different rules). The sun should rise in one quarter of the sky and set in another every day unless there's a reason for it to do otherwise, for example because the campaign takes places in a hollow world with a stationary interior sun (as in the *Providence RPG*).

And the GM should be careful when deciding that he wants his game world to differ significantly from the real world. I set my first *D&D* campaign on a world without a moon just to be different, only to run into problems the first time a

PC was infected with lycanthropy; without a moon, how frequently would he make his uncontrolled changes, and when? And for that matter, without a moon what sort of emblem would a moon goddess such as the Greek Diana have? Would there even *be* a moon goddess on such a world?

The majority of GMs won't even notice this restriction; most campaign worlds are just variations on our world, and the GM has little trouble keeping things straight with such a detailed model to follow. If campaign consistency is to break down, it generally does so in two realms: PC-NPC interactions, and in game sub-systems that differ from the real-world model.

In the hands of some GMs, a character who is a trusted friend of the PCs can turn into a shiftless traitor at a moments' notice, because they needed some way to force the PCs down another plot path and the NPC was convenient. These GMs don't see NPCs as people with defined lives in the campaign, but rather as mouthpieces for whatever they want to communicate to the players, or as handy, all-purpose characters, able to fill whatever momentary roles the needs of the story open up.

NPCs should be treated as if they have working minds, as people who react genuinely to what the PCs say and do to them, and to what the game world presents them with. This allows the players to treat them as individuals, confiding in the character they've come to think of as trustworthy, relying on the courage of the one they think brave, etc. Unfortunately, it can tie the GM's hands if he can't think of an in-character way to make one of his creations perform in a certain uncharacteristic manner, but "deep" characters can be more interesting to GM and players then "shallow" ciphers.

As for breakdowns in the game's rules, these occur when the GM is forced to interpret something for which he doesn't have an obvious real-world analogue. If a player wants his PC to perform some feat with a real-world equivalent, the GM can compare the description of the PC's ability to his own experience to come up with an answer ("No, if your Strength is listed as 'below average,' you can't move a 2-ton boulder."). But where there's nothing in the real world to guide him (could someone with below-average Psychic power telekinetically move that boulder?), he'll be forced to make a decision on the spot.

Deprived of real-world comparisons, the GM has a number of options open to him: he can draw an analogy to another part of the game's rules ("Well, if you had a below-average Strength you wouldn't be able to move the boulder, so I guess a below-average Psychic power score would have the same result"), he can do whatever he thinks would best further the plot (as advocated by the genre of storytelling games including *Everway* and *Amber*), or he can let the dice rule (*Toon* advocates reducing such problems to a yes-or-no question and applying The 50 Percent Rule: 1-3 on a d6 is "yes," and 4-6 is "no").

But whatever conflict-resolution method he chooses, he should remember to use the same result if a similar situation crops up in the future and the same method to solve other problems of the same sort but with different details. The reason for doing this if a near-identical situation occurs is obvious; no-one wants to deal with "but it worked last time" whines. The reason for consistently using the same method is that it allows the players to predict the results of their actions, giving them guidelines as to what actions they should or shouldn't take if they want to get a desired result. If the GM uses an argument based on analogy one day, the players will start to think along those lines when they want to do something not covered in the rules. If the GM then switches to drama-based criteria, the players will find their expectations conflicting with the results the GM announces. And once they've settled into drama-mode and have some confidence that the GM will let the PCs do interesting, if improbable, things as long as they produce a better story, switching to realistic probabilities and dice rolling before announcing the death of the PCs will truly dishearten the players.

Believability

And just as the players have to embrace the reality of an unreal world, they must also suspend their disbelief in its unreality. They must believe in the campaign world and its inhabitants, interacting with the inanimate world as they would with a real world (e.g., bothering to carry umbrellas or wear raincoats in the GM mentions that it's raining) and with NPCs as they would with real, living people.

The GM should be careful not to present things to the players which might shock them out of game reality and back to the mundane world. The classic example is the huge, ancient dragon living comfortably in a 20-foot-wide room with only a 3-foot-wide door; while there are numerous ways in which it could have entered the room (maybe it was hatched there, or knows a shape-changing spell), the players' first reaction will be disbelief. Improbable coincidences, irrational characters, and even simple stilted dialogue can all serve to remind the players that they're just sitting around a table telling a story, crippling their abilities to get into that story.

An NPC more important than just scenery can be patterned on a real person to make him more believable. A shopkeeper whose prices are always the same and who never has anything of interest to say quickly fades into the background. One who raises or lowers his prices based on a Price Fluctuation Table is annoying, but hardly believable. But a merchant who adjusts his prices according to some personal scheme (such as a halfling merchant with a grudge against all taller races, or a perceptive merchant who charges what he thinks his customers can afford) is both memorable and credible.

On the other hand, while all NPCs should be believable, not all have to be memorable; most shopkeepers should fade into the background after use.

The level of believability also serves to set the tone for the campaign, telling the players how they should react to the game. If the campaign is supposed to be in a realistic modern setting but the GM immediately begins describing obvious space-aliens walking the city streets without raising eyebrows, the players become confused about what the campaign is supposed to be about. But if the GM had either announced that the campaign was going to be based on a comic-book-reality, or if he had been subtle about the introduction of the weird elements, then the players' reaction would have been more accepting. Thus, the same strange events and creatures can appear in either an *X-Files*/**GURPS Illuminati** conspiracy-type setting or in a **GURPS I.O.U.** comedy setting, it's just how they're handled that tells the players which setting their PCs are in.

The GM isn't free to just throw story-elements together and call it a campaign. No matter how weird and wonderful he makes the setting, a good GM still keeps a foot stuck in the mud of the real world since that's where his players are coming from, and where they feel most comfortable.

Fairness

Generally, discussions about cheating in RPGs concentrate on preventing the players from doing it, but it's much easier for the GM to cheat in games because so much of what he does is kept secret from the players and because he's the arbiter in any disputes that arise. In fact, the GM can even cheat without realizing that he's doing it.

Something Less than God

There are situations in which cheating on the part of the GM is justifiable. If a player lies about what comes up when he rolls his dice, that's cheating, but if the GM lies about dice-rolls it's his motivation that determines whether it's cheating or beneficial "fudging." If he's doing it to further the plot or to prevent an unnecessary character-death, that's fudging. But if he's doing it to kill-off a PC he doesn't like or to protect the life of one of his prized NPCs (except to further some dramatic-goal, such as having the villain return to fight on another day), then it's cheating.

Similarly, a GM can change the pre-determined events and encounters of an adventure on the fly as a result of changes in the need of the plot or in the direction that the PCs have taken. If his modifications improve the storyline, they're acceptable, but if he's making the changes because he's upset that the players didn't get to see the genius of a death trap he'd set in their path but which they side-stepped, then it's cheating.

But the GM can still be unfair without having to break any of the rules of the game if he's not even-handed in every other aspect of his GMing conduct. If he has the most dangerous monster target one PC while lesser monsters attack others, he has to think about the justification for his monster-assignments. It would be all right for the GM to deliberately face each hero with an opponent that would provide equal challenge, but not to deliberately overmatch a PC unless there's an over-riding reason.

And even a well-meant gesture, such as making encounters easy for a novice player, can go too far. If, for instance, he weakens the opponents who face his girlfriend's PC for fear that she'll get upset with him if her character suffers, the other players might resent such favouritism.

While events in the game world can seem manifestly unfair to the PCs, the GM must remember to be fair to the players, since they're the ones whose presence is essential to the existence of the campaign, not the characters. It's a bitter pill to swallow, but every player in the game (including the GM) must occasionally let his own pleasure take a back seat to that of the rest of the group, and the GM should be mature enough to let his NPCs and game world be snubbed or injured in order to further the plot and ensure the enjoyment of the whole group.

Fun

An RPG adventure should be exciting, engaging, puzzling, satisfying, edifying, and a whole lot of other adjectives that add up to one concept: fun. The GM's ability to manipulate events and characters is limited in that he can't push things out of that realm.

But why would a sane GM design an adventure that wasn't fun? The problem is with differing definitions of "fun."

Some of the pleasures the GM derives from RPGs are world-building, puzzle-crafting, and just the ability to control things. And these pleasures have parallels among the players: world-exploration, puzzle-solving, and the ability to control their own characters. The GM enjoys setting up challenges for the players, and they enjoy overcoming them. But if the GM takes too much pleasure in the challenge and not enough in watching his friends overcome it, he ends up producing unwinnable adventures and then blaming his players for their inability to solve his conundrums and to appreciate his genius. And if he makes his adventures treasure-filled Monty Hauls with no serious challenges in hopes of maximizing the enjoyment of the other players, he runs the risk of boring himself so much that he becomes dissatisfied with his own campaign.

There is some perverse pleasure in creating riddles no-one else can answer, in creating ethical dilemmas which leave the PCs with no "good" choice, or even in killing off the entire party, but it's a solitary pleasure. And getting lots of no-risk treasure and experience points provides momentary thrills to the players, but even they will become jaded eventually.

Memorable RPG experiences come from overcoming obstacles and actually accomplishing things, so while a riddle may be difficult enough that it stumps legions of NPCs (with deadly, Sphinx-inspired, consequences), the PCs' story is a meaningless reiteration of that if they can't be the ones to finally solve the riddle, and there'll be no sense of achievement if, after all its build-up, the riddle is ridiculously easy.

The Ghost In The Machine

So, with the players commanding much of what takes place in the campaign, and with these other considerations hemming the GM in at every turn, what role's left for him to play? The GM is the Demiurge who creates the backdrop for the campaign and then starts the adventure rolling, and he's Fate presenting obstacles to the heroes to keep their quest from being a momentary diversion. He's the Muses, there to inspire the players to action when their emotions flag and their minds wander, and he's Nike who rejoices with them in their victories before he once again becomes the plot-creating Demiurge. Not God, but still gods.

Pyramid Pick

Fudge Expanded Edition RPG

Published by [Grey Ghost Press, Inc.](#)

Written by Steffan O'Sullivan

128 pages, $19.95

I thought I was going to have an easy review; after all, *surely* **Fudge** must have been reviewed at *some* point in *Pyramid*'s past. So when the **Fudge Expanded Edition** came out, I thought, "Hey, I can just run a review saying what's different, take my $50 credit voucher, and spiral into the night with a handful of **GURPS** books." But, alas, no . . . somehow this book escaped *Pyramid*'s all-seeing eye.

So, from the top:

In its basic form, **Fudge** is a worldless roleplaying game system, not unlike **GURPS** or the **Hero System**. But while these latter systems focus on numerical precision and accuracy, **Fudge** encourages you to . . . well, *fudge* it. In **Fudge**, all attributes, skills, and abilities (called traits) are rated on a word-based scale: Superb, Great, Good, Fair, Mediocre, Poor, and Terrible. Thus you might be a Great Doctor, or a Mediocre Gambler. A dice mechanic generates a step on this continuum from +4 to -4; thus your Great Doctor might roll a -2, resulting in a Fair job, while your Mediocre Gambler may have a phenomenal +4 roll, resulting in a Superb job.

These results are compared to the level needed to succeed; this is generally Fair but can be higher or lower if the task is more or less difficult. And contested actions are easy; two Gamblers would each generate a result and compare them.

This is pretty straightforward so far. But the beauty of **Fudge** comes from the fact that almost *nothing* is necessary for the system to work. There are no established attributes, no skill lists, no set advantages or disadvantages. Instead each GM decides what will be necessary for the kind of game they're running. Thus a game may have very broad attributes (Physical, Mental, Social), or very specific (Manual Dexterity, Agility, Instinct, Willpower, etc.). Skills may be painted with broad strokes (Weapons), slightly more specific (Guns), or even more specific (AK-47s), depending on the need of the genre and campaign.

In addition to Attributes and Skills, there are also Gifts (and their counterparts, Faults). These are abilities (or limitations) you either have or you don't. Again, there's no set lists of what's possible, but instead GMs and players are encouraged to come up with their own. Thus you might have Gifts like Absolute Direction Sense, Contacts with the Army, or Immunity to Poisons, while your faults might be things like Unattractive, Disliked by Animals, or Sleepwalking. Keep in mind that these can vary from campaign to campaign; one GM may have a Gift called Eidetic Memory, while another might have a Skill (or Attribute!) called Memory, which you could buy up to Superb.

The beauty of the system comes from its elegance of adding (or removing . . . or changing) elements as needed. For example, I ran a *Star Trek* campaign using **Fudge** about five years ago. Although I liked FASA's skill lists and background material, the underlying system didn't seem terribly fun for me, nor very intuitive for the two *Star Trek* fans I'd recruited that were newbies to roleplaying. For the most part I used FASA's attributes (Strength, Endurance, Intellect, Dexterity, Charisma), but I decided Luck and Psi would be Gifts. So when making the character of the ship's doctor we had attributes that looked like this:

Strength: Fair

Endurance: Good
Intellect: Superb
Dexterity: Fair
Charisma: Great

I showed this to the newbie player, and she immediately had an idea of what her character was like and what her character could do. "But I was wondering," she said, "if there was a way I could make this character more liked by men than by women."

"Sure," I said, and I proceeded to split Charisma: Great into Charisma (Women): Good and Charisma (Men): Superb. If it became important to have a "neutral" Charisma at some point, it would still be Great, but otherwise I was able to give her what she wanted. Another player wanted a finer distinction for her character's Dexterity, so I split it into Manual Dexterity and Agility. Each player thought of skills that their characters would have that weren't covered by the game, so they just made them up; I approved of them. The system still worked.

Attributes that a character doesn't have are assumed to be Fair, while Skills are assumed to be Poor (though easier skills may default to Mediocre while harder ones are Terrible). Character creation can either be Objective, where everyone uses the same attribute/skill lists, or Subjective, where a detailed character concept is created first, then stats are determined by the player and GM based on that concept.

In play the system is a snap; in my game it took all of five minutes to get everyone up to speed, and results were very easy to interpret. The player with a Good Transporter skill understood immediately that he made a Great result, and I, as GM, was able to say what that meant. The system also provides players the ability to alter dice rolls (by spending something called Fudge Points), and the ability to buy skills everyone forgot the character should logically have (called Uncommitted Traits) (The latter neatly eliminates cries of, "What do you mean my Samurai doesn't have Origami? I forgot about it . . . ") I *do* recommend using **Fudge Dice** -- basically a set of four dice with two sides marked with a plus, two sides with nothing, and two sides with a minus (yes, a d3) -- also from Grey Ghost Press, since it reduces overt numbers even further and makes it very easy to glance and determine a result.

Combat is very well thought-out, and includes a plethora of options for making it as cinematic or realistic as you'd like, but I never found the system to be terribly "fun." This is probably mostly due to personal preference against combat, but I found the system was always at its best for my GMing style when used in non-combat actions.

All in all, the main part of the book is filled with options and possibilities to think about: variable dice-rolling methods (resulting in variable probabilities of the -/+4 spread), lots of sample characters (each one using a different spread of attributes/skills), sample attribute/skill lists to consider, etc. Almost anything I could think of is covered, usually well; there's rules for dealing with variable scales (if you wanted to play a mixed group of giants and tiny people, for example), magic systems, psi, animals, cyberware, and others. The book is not indexed, which may be a problem for some, but is so intuitively laid out with a true decimal numbering system (for example, Section 1.35 comes between Section 1.3 and Section 1.4) that I seldom had much problem finding what I needed.

The last part of the book, and the primary portion that I believe makes it "revised," is **Fantasy Fudge**, a complete version of **Fudge** customized for Fantasy games. This is a great example of "putting it all together;" this is, in essence, a complete fantasy game using the **Fudge** rules. There are set attributes and skill lists, gifts/faults, character types, monsters, etc. They *do*, however, go to great lengths to show and explain that this is merely an example of what can be done with the system, rather than a canonical listing of attributes or the like. This section is a very good nuts-and-bolts example of how to make it all work, and is definitely pleasant to read, but didn't inspire much in me personally to make me want to run a **Fantasy Fudge** game.

Although I love **Fudge**, I definitely do believe it is neither flawless, nor ideal for everyone. First, it places extraordinary demands on the GM; practically every aspect of a campaign needs to be considered before commitments to attributes or skill lists can be made. (How *will* having a Luck attribute affect the game?) Once these decisions are made, however, play is generally very smooth.

Second, it is, by definition, very imprecise; if you need a system that says, "A Strength of 81 allows you to carry 4,204

kilograms," this is not the system for you. The GMs and players will need to be of similar minds of what a person with a "Good Strength" can do, or there's going to be problems. The scale systems are also, in my opinion, not terribly intuitive; if you need Superman-style characters to interact with normal humans, this system may not work as well as one that is intrinsically logarithmic (such as ***Masterbook*** or ***DC Heroes***). ***Fudge*** is, most definitely, not for "munchkins" or (again) players who demand precision; since almost everything relies on GM intervention/fiat, players determined to either break the game or make the GM miserable will almost certainly succeed. There are no mechanics for what a successful Tracking skill roll will do, nor detailed systems for Taming Ferrets. Finally, the game may feel grainy to some players; since the range of an action can vary by +/-4, some players and GMs may be bothered by the notion of a Mediocre Writer creating a Superb book (or, conversely, how a Good chef can create a Terrible meal).

But these quibbles aside, ***Fudge*** remains one of my favorite systems of all time. In the hands of an experienced GM, it allows a painless introduction to roleplaying for new players. It allows for making almost *exactly* the character you would like to play, and, provided you like the basic system, can be endlessly modified and tinkered with to create a game system you would like. It remains the only game system where I was able to make NPCs at the rate of one per minute. And the basic system is available for free online at www.fudgerpg.com, so there's little incentive *not* to check it out. (I must confess, though, that having a nicely printed and illustrated book has made me spoiled from the dot-matrix-printed, dog-eared spiral-bound copy of the unexpanded edition I printed five years ago.)

Fudge allowed for an almost immediate transparent roleplaying experience for my players, letting everyone fully enjoy the characters and world we created. And that, in my mind, is well worth a place of honor on my gaming bookshelf.

--Steven Marsh

Play Dirty

"Be fair. . . . Dice are arbitrary, and because of that, you have to be fair. A fair GM always takes things into consideration when he makes decisions. He has to consider the consequences of his decisions and how they will impact the players in his campaign. Of course, this means that sometimes the GM has to break the rules . . ."
-- John Wick, ***7th Sea Game Master's Guide***

Consider this a tribute to a fallen fellow columnist, one who always followed the Secret Columnist Rule: Make Them Care Enough To Bitch. Consider it GM's advice by example, whether positive or negative being a question for the reader, not the writer. Consider it a convenient excuse to tell war stories, some of them, as we say in the columnist biz, "composites" of the kind of stories I'd have to give way too much setup for otherwise. Consider the question of whether, as you vigorously denounce the following cheap shots and scurvy knave's tricks, you have ever Played Dirty. And enjoyed it.

* * *

I'm going to start this off with a dirty trick one of my players accidentally taught me. Ron was a power gamer, and a born psychologist. He was the kind of player who, at the initial character creation session, would ask the seemingly innocuous question that a harried GM always agrees to, because there's six or seven other people wanting to know if they can be members of the Golden Dawn or something.

Ron: "Can my character have a fire opal pinkie ring?" (Or some damn thing.)

Me, busily checking someone else's sheet to make sure that the alleged doctor character has bothered to take any Medicine skills: "Sure, whatever."

Six sessions later, after I've forgotten that his character has a pinkie, much less a fire opal on it, the characters are trapped by a mesmeric rainbow-serpent, the minion of The Bad Guy -- in order, I thought, to convince them to run back down into the mineshaft and find the damn adventure hook I buried there. But Ron's character tosses the fire-opal at the thing, distracting it, and the players beat it down, and chase The Bad Guy into the desert to parch to death or whatever.

Ron's monologues at times like that were always masterpieces of calm rationality, delivered at a steady lope that subconsciously encouraged me to fall into rhythm and keep the game moving: "Well, it's a being with strong ties to the desert here, where you said there were opal mines, and for all I know we're in one here, and gems have magic (or at least that sorceror who summoned this thing used a gem) so I figure it's good for a distraction at least."

Ron, you see, knew ahead of time that I like to use spur-of-the-moment symbology (because he knew I was a Tim Powers fan) and that in any magical-type campaign I ran, there'd likely be magic gems cropping up (because they're cool). If I didn't let him have his magical gem, he'd be sure to keep the bullets the bad guys fired, or the tape-recording of their voices, to use in sympathetic magic -- which he knew I, as an old Frazerian, would allow. So he gamed me every time, using my interests, and my responsibilities as GM to keep the game moving, against me. And I enjoyed it, because I enjoy rewarding player action rather than stifling it.

* * *

So what did Ron teach me?

Two things.

The first, and obvious, lesson is "Know your enemy." I had another player who made the foolish mistake of confiding to me that bugs creeped him out, especially moths. Two months later, guess which player got the West Virginia Mothman scratching at the roof of his character's car? By knowing that Ted is a cryptophile from way back, I can

ensure any number of awful things are unleashed upon the PCs if all that keeps them at bay is a coded data file.

Me: "There's a dead man sitting in the chair, staring at his computer screen with his face twisted into a rictus of horror."

Ted: "A computer screen? What's running on it?"

Me: "You don't know; it seems to be in some kind of code."

Ted: "I shove the corpse out of the chair and start decrypting the file."

The second lesson is more subtle, but potentially more powerful: I never *need* to write the exit to the deathtrap. Like a careful GM, I used to write three exits to anything -- and Ron would always find the fourth. And it would be cleverer than all three of mine. Eventually, Ron began to infect the other players: I playtested Gernsback from **GURPS Alternate Earths** in a massive pulp extravaganza called "Doctor Fang And His Zeppelin Of Doom." I used the suggestion in **GURPS Cliffhangers** of ending every session with a deathtrap. (Yes, this required some hefty GM scripting. Three quick points: It was a pulp serial, so scripting was in genre. It was a *good* script. And for all their whining, most players vastly prefer a trip on the railroad searching for the McGuffin Of Seven Scenario Seeds to screwing around the tavern all night, especially if you let them toot the whistle and ring the bell every so often.) Every session, I never knew how the players would escape: I played every scene as though I *knew* the players were doomed. And every week, the next session would begin with some player saying something like "Well, since I have Tesla's old impedance resonator, I should be able to tune it to the Earth's magnetic field and stop our fall off the Empire State Building's zeppelin mast . . . "

Seven player heads are better than one GM head at tactics, attacking any problem from all angles, brainstorming, and saving their tail.

So use them to do your work. In the time you save, you can be looking up cool stuff about opals.

* * *

That has a reverse, of course, a kind of GM judo using the players' strength against them. One head is far better than seven for seeing things in a unified perspective. A decade or two of trying to get players to spot clues has convinced me that if there's any clue you absolutely don't want them to notice, mention it matter-of-factly in the second half hour of the game. For extra safety, mention it right before the Big Obvious Clue A Mile High. Let's say you're trying to get the players to miss the fact that the Dionysian cults are behind the human sacrifices.

GM: "The old woman reluctantly pulls the thick oaken door back, revealing the stairs. You go down into Lord Vachel's cellar, brushing the thick, clinging cobwebs out of the way. Against the wall is the wine rack, decorated with pseudo-Gothic Green Man carvings. There's torch sconces, tallow drips on the flagstones, the standard wine-cellar deal. Over in the corner of the cellar is a low stone table, with rings at the corners and a groove carved in it."

Players: "A groove? Like a sacrificial altar?"

GM: "Very much like a sacrificial altar. As you approach it, you can see that it's choked with brownish stains."

Players, delighted beyond expression: "Blood! I'll bet it's human blood! Those rings must be manacles! Ooh, are there any pieces of obsidian laying around?" [Mad scramble to play with the altar ensues.]

If your players are basically good sorts, like mine are, during the first half hour (of game play, not necessarily of the evening) they're consciously trying to be good and pay attention. But unless you're running an incredibly taut thriller, after about a half an hour, their attention flags a bit, if only because they've got a half hour of game to digest and figure out. Put in enough stuff (which is a good idea anyway, because details and connections make the world look more like ours, which is not to say "realistic") and they'll float right by it. Then toss in something to wake them up and prevent them from concentrating on it. Once you're sure they've missed it, you're free to hang your villain's plot on it. If

you need it, it can even be a Get Out Of Plot Corners Free card; call attention to it with a second, more obvious clue (like a break-in, or a magical attack). When the players spot it, they'll assign every other plot hole to "that damn Dionysian sect we trusted like idiots." You'll see problems you didn't even know your campaign had solve themselves because seven heads are furiously working to solve them for you.

* * *

Do that to them enough times, and you can get them to take detailed scenario notes.

Which, as GM, you can "borrow" whenever you like, and use to find stuff you just tossed in as scenery that you can later claim you put in on purpose.

It's fun to use the change-up, here, and pretend like you don't want the players to notice:

GM: "The tome describes shrines draped in thick cobwebs *[guilty pause, GM looks around shiftily]* where the cultists performed human sacrifices *[GM punches it, gloating to himself]* to free the Spider Goddess' *[said in a voice of mock-lightness, the GM trying to pretend the tome has it obviously wrong]* spawn from her victims. The victim's blood, full of the Goddess' eggs, was then carefully decanted into sacred wine bottles." *[Oh, now he's given it up! The GM suddenly looks horribly stricken! However could he have made that crucial slip?]*

Players, excited at the GM's accidental revelation: "Spider Goddess? Oh, no, she must be the power behind the cult of Dionysos! Weren't there thick cobwebs in Lord Vachel's cellar? I'll bet that old caretaker woman knows more than she's telling!"

[GM rolls eyes to indicate good-natured acceptance of his thwarting by the So-Clever Players, and shuffles notes to the spider ambush the players have just talked themselves into rushing back into.]

Since combats take a while, and make natural climaxes to a session, you can finish the night on an up note, with lots of yelling and setting webs on fire, and Horrid Spider-Young boiling out of the broken bottles. And you have all next week to hastily write the background on the Spider Goddess cult that has, unbeknownst to everyone involved, including you, been working behind the scenes from the beginning.

Pyramid Review

Three Days to Kill (for D&D 3rd Edition)

Published by Penumbra (Atlas Games)

Written by John Tynes

32 pages; $8.95

When Wizards of the Coast opened up their new Third Edition d20 system for use
by other publishers, plenty of companies perked up their ears at this opportunity to
freely publish *D&D* related material. Atlas Games was one of the few who were
able provide some of their own d20 material right along with the initial release of
D&D 3rd Ed. in August. All of Atlas' d20 *D&D* supplements are being published under the Penumbra subdivision, and
Three Days To Kill, by John Tynes, is the first to come up to bat.

It's a 32-page adventure that was released as a limited preview edition at GenCon 2000, with a standard edition release
following shortly thereafter. The artwork and graphic design of the module are both very well done, upholding the
standards that TSR and WotC have maintained in the visual design of their own adventure modules throughout the
years. This is not really a big deal coming from Atlas Games (who always manage to do something nice when laying
out their products), but as more and more companies begin releasing d20 supplements on smaller and smaller budgets,
we will begin to appreciate those who can spare the money and the effort to make their supplements look nice.

The adventure itself is also well constructed. It is set in a town called Deeptown, which is located in a valley known as
the Deeps. The setting is just specific enough to host the adventure, but also just generic enough (and self-contained
enough) to be easily dropped into any other campaign world. Deeptown is a big center for commerce, as it lies along a
major trade route that passes through the valley. All this money and merchandise passing through make this an ideal
location for both trouble and opportunity, attracting bandits, merchants, mercenaries, and opportunists of every color.
This, of course, is where the players fit in.

While the law manages to keep things under control within Deeptown, outside the city gates it's another story. The
territory is run by different groups of bandits, with two in particular taking the lead -- Modus and Lucien. The two
have managed to avoid direct conflict with each other . . . at least until now. One of the two leaders (Lucien) has
decided to make an allegiance with a nefarious religious leader from Deeptown. Modus has learned of this and hires
the PCs to pull a hit on Lucien while he is meeting with reps from the religious sect. As you can imagine, things don't
go one hundred percent as planned. The PCs are sorely out-gunned against Lucien to begin with, and when a band of
raiding orcs and a "surprise straight out of hell" show up, things get messy.

The opponents in this adventure are all very tough (at least for low-level adventurers), and the PCs will have to work
to stay alive. Tynes has responded to this by gearing the adventure more for espionage and clever planning, rather than
straight-out combat. The players are encouraged to be imaginative and use the different tools at their disposal to outwit
their opponents and work for the best resolution possible. This provides ample opportunity for players of all classes to
use their many different skills in as many different ways. The end result is a very dynamic and exciting, albeit
dangerous, adventure.

One thing the readers will definitely notice a certain style that Tynes has. He has a particular grasp over the darker side
of human nature, and it definitely comes through in this adventure. The town is run by a bunch of merchants, which
means that money is the bottom line here. These merchants are all, of course, very greedy and have few truly
upstanding morals. Many of the other folks in the town are little better, which gives the place a certain overall feel. It's

not that Tynes stretches reality in any way; everything that goes on is perfectly reasonable, and, some may argue, quite realistic. The real problem that might present itself is that DMs running a group of lawful-goods through this adventure might have a tough time of it, depending on how deeply the PCs look into things.

If this is any indication of the type of material that Penumbra will be putting out in support of *D&D*, then this open licensing thing is looking up already. This adventure is definitely worthwhile. We can only hope that the other publishers preparing to take advantage of the d20 system will be able to provide such quality material as well.

--Jon Thompson

Pyramid Pick

Shiki (for Sengoku RPG)

Published by [Gold Rush Games](#)

Written by Michael Montesa

96 pages, $16.00

Most gamers -- not to mention gaming companies -- have a love/hate relationship with prepackaged adventures. On the one hand, they're incredibly handy, saving the Game Master many hours of painstaking effort needed to produce his own scenarios. Prepackaged adventures come with everything you need: NPC stats, maps, background information, and (if you're lucky) synopses and outlines. On the other hand, the very nature of prepackaged adventures generally preclude their being too specific, for in doing so they diminish their utility to the broadest possible audience of gamers. Thus, game publishers must always walk a fine line between providing so much detail that it prevents the adventure's being usable by many GMs and so little that the GM might as well have designed it himself.

All things considered, *Shiki*, an epic adventure anthology for Gold Rush Games' *Sengoku*, walks that fine line very well indeed. Of course, *Shiki* "cheats" a little in that it's not a run of the mill collection of unrelated scenarios. Instead, it's more of a campaign framework that provides the GM with four adventures, each one tied thematically the one of the four seasons (the eponymous Shiki of the title) and to each other by an overarching plotline.

That plotline concerns the quest of the player characters to protect the heir of a defeated clan until such time as he can rightfully claim his place as daimyo of Suruga province. Each of the four scenarios in the anthology pushes along this plotline, which spans eighteen years of campaign time (from approximately 1550 to 1568). Consequently, *Shiki* necessarily gives the GM a great deal of freedom in using its material. After the initial scenario in which the Tadano clan is overthrown by its rivals, the Ishizaki, the remaining three scenarios can occur whenever the GM desires, within certain limited timeline constraints. Even here, *Shiki* provides plenty of flexibility, thereby increasing its utility greatly.

The first of the four scenarios ("Heavier than a Mountain"), naturally set in the fall, describes the fall of the Tadano and the player character's role in rescuing its heir, the boy Kozo, from the clutches of Lord Ishizaki, who is determined to eliminate him along with the rest of his family. The second scenario ("Shinobi"), taking place in spring, deals with clandestine activities and covert alliances, as Kozo's protector attempts to secure his own position against the Ishizaki. The third scenario ("Kori no Namida") takes place in winter and chronicles the effects of a curse placed on young Kozo by the Ishizaki, a curse that could make all the player characters have worked for come to naught. The final scenario ("Debt of Honor") occurs during the summer, as Kozo reaches maturity prepares to reclaim his birthright from the devious Ishizaki.

All four scenarios are well constructed, providing clear synopses and outlines, as well as advice on staging and further adventures. Because *Shiki*'s four adventures take place over a long period of time, the latter is especially appreciated. Thus the anthology provides the GM everything he needs to give his *Sengoku* campaign an overarching structure, while at the time allowing leeway to add further details and scenarios. It's a very effective compromise between the twin sins of over-scripting and under-detailing that mar many anthologies of this sort.

The book is rounded out by detailed descriptions of all major and minor NPCs, complete with stats for them according to the Fuzion rules. Also included is information on the natural and supernatural creatures that appear in several of the scenarios. There's even a handy conversion chart showing how to use *Shiki* with the anthropomorphic animals of the *Usagi Yojimbo RPG*, also from Gold Rush Games. It's a nice little touch that doesn't take up much space, while once again increasing the utility of *Shiki*.

In fact, *Shiki* is so user friendly that I found it hard not to consider how easily its plotline of restoring a fallen clan to power could be used in other settings. With a minimum of difficulty, one could translate *Shiki* into the feudal world of Green Knight's *Pendragon* or even a world like *Tekumel*, where clan politics and personal honor clash regularly. I suspect astute readers will think of other game settings equally applicable. This makes *Shiki* a valuable resource for players of many games.

If I have a complaint about *Shiki*, it is the book's relatively uninspired layout and graphic design. The cover is black, with an ideogram (presumably for Shiki) and the title of the book. The interior layout is a simple two-column design that's easy enough to read but not especially dynamic. The interior art is made up of mostly good quality black and white illustrations by many of the same artists that graced the pages of *Sengoku*. In fact, *Shiki* has quite a bit of art, much more than you'd expect to find in a small press book like this. It goes a long way toward breaking up the monotony of the layout.

In the end, though, it's a small complaint and one that hardly mars *Shiki*'s otherwise excellent content. While it would be hyperbole to claim *Shiki* sets new standards in adventure anthology design, it would accurate to claim that it does an excellent job of providing the GM with a flexible framework into which he can tell his own stories of feudal Japan. *Shiki* thus succeeds in providing the tools the GM needs to tell a grand story in which the player characters can genuinely make a difference, while at the same time not binding his hands overly much. Given the epic nature of *Shiki*'s plotline, that's quite an accomplishment, one that I'd love to see emulated in other settings.

--James Maliszewski

Pyramid Review

Orkworld RPG

Published by [Wicked Press](#)

Written by John Wick

Art by Thomas Denmark

304 pages; $25.00

To paraphrase his Prelude, Wick's goal in the creation of *Orkworld* was to put (for
lack of a better phrase) a more human face onto the two-dimensional Tolkien orc bad guy. For just about anyone who
bothers to sit and really read *Orkworld*, he's succeeded.

Orkworld is loaded with differences from the standard gaming sourcebook. The first and most telling difference is its
structure. Many sourcebooks begin with a short teaser story, then progress through the basics of character generation,
combat rules, acquisition of gear and weaponry, and eventually meander their way into the real feel of the thing -- the
culture, backgrounds, and "flavor text" of the world and its peoples. Not so with *Orkworld*. The feeling and meaning
of "ork" are front-loaded: the first 175 pages are devoted solely to the kinds of information that many gamers flip past
to find the rules. Everything from ork jokes to the three kinds of gangrene and how to treat them can be found in this
incredible compendium of orkness. It's broken into three sections: "The Caius Journals," "Ork" (called "Culture" in the
page headers -- more on that below), and "Stories." Wick uses the space to pull with ork muscles, talk with an ork
tongue, and help us beat time with an ork heart.

"Culture" is the heart of *Orkworld*, and weighs in at seventy pages long. (I've used here the title of the section that
appears on every page's headers, rather than the title ["Ork"] that appears in the Table of Contents and in the Prelude.
I'm sure Wick would be the first to admit it, but *Orkworld* has some editing and printer problems. More below.) This is
the most interesting section as far as source material goes. It could easily stand by itself in many systems as a
sourcebook. Wick's orks are an odd but memorable mixture of Norse mores, Celtic storytelling, chivalric ideals, steppe
culture lifeways, and Sutton Hoo artistic style. There's a strong Native American Trickster streak in them, too -- less
Coyote, more Brer Rabbit. There's a healthy dollop of Celtic Britain, not to mention Roman era Gaul. Combine this
with some gruesome medieval and Renaissance misconceptions about anatomy and the armature of sickness, and there
are the orks.

Wick's style shows best in the concepts of weight and Trouble. In a migratory culture like the orks', following the
reindeer herds across the face of Ghurtha, an ork can only own as much as he can carry -- and that applies to the most
metaphysical things, as well as household furniture. Trouble is one of those things that must be carried. Every ork is
born with a certain amount of Trouble: the sorrows and sufferings that every living thing must go through before
dying. Trouble may be increased by boasting and/or by attracting the notice of gods and monsters. A particularly
stupid ork might take on more Trouble than he can handle, leaving his loved ones to carry his excess. Devoted Wick
readers will also be pleased by the system he provides for rolling and determining Trouble's effects on gameplay,
which is offered in a later section. The system involves the same nasty dice exchanges and thefts that made his Play
Dirty column a jaw-dropper.

Also covered in "Culture" is a vast array of orkness: their pantheon, magic, tribal and living arrangements, foods,
village life, household politics, crime and punishment, the calendar, music, love, art, hygiene, household gear, diseases,
warfare, the five Fana (Virtues), the laws of war, and anatomy. The only thing missing from the list is just how Wick
got through so much information without either losing his mind or spontaneously goblinizing into an ork himself.

The next section is the core of the ork myth cycle, simply entitled "Stories." These "Brother-Stories" surround the three god-sons of Keethdowmga. The primary actor is Pugg, the smallest of the god-brothers, who is the lamed Trickster god. He serves as a daily amusing reminder that an ork could win every battle, but he's not much of an ork if he doesn't have cunning. He gets results -- at the expense of all sorts of monsters -- that Bashthraka, his brother the war god, can never hope for (or even figure out). Gowthduka, the silent brother, is a sort of Odin figure; he is a living example of the fact that all knowledge comes at a price. The three form a sort of hopeful triad of good qualities from which the orks believe a savior will arise, to lead the orks past their nemesis Gorlam and into their much-deserved afterlife.

The deepest lesson to be learned from Wick's orks is their passion and life. They are a stone and bronze-wielding people in a steel world. They have been denied their own afterlives by the combined efforts of all the world's other races; the giant frog beast Gorlam, created by the spite of humans, elves, and dwarves, eats the souls of the ork dead before they can reach the Otherworld. The lands of the living are being encroached upon as well, and the elves routinely slave among them. They are a people on the edge of desperation. That their stories are filled with cunning mirth is a confirmation, rather than denial, of their dire straits. And yet instead of feeling hopeless, the orks burn with intention. It's the only thing keeping them warm in the eight-month winters.

To remain hopeful in a dire world is not for players who are faint of heart; but for a GM to inspire hope in his players without the easy out of munchkin fun is even tougher. On the system side, beginning with the section entitled "Game," *Orkworld* is amazingly simple. It is elegant in its lack of rules. And that is precisely what makes it a potentially great (but tough) system to play or run. Its elegance and simplicity leaves much up to the imagination -- or to the munchkin who's crass enough to bully his way through it. *Orkworld* places great demands on the maturity of all concerned. GMs suffering with unimaginative (or bullying) players, beware: *Orkworld* will drive you crazy. But if you're very careful and cunning, you can drive them crazy back.

The most intriguing thing about *Orkworld*'s system, especially in what it reveals about ork culture, is that characters are not created individually. Players create their characters from a *pool* of points. If a player hogs enough points to be a combat monster, his PC friends will suffer (and likely die) from his stupidity. In addition, and very amusingly, his tala -- the household bard, the person who is directly responsible for the spreading of fame through his storytelling -- isn't likely to be a very good one if he had no points at character creation. This leaves the ork combat monster without a way to have the story of his exploits told. (In game terms, this shortchanges him on experience points because it's the *tala* that assigns them, rather than the GM. A very cunning and nasty Wick-ism. His fans will be proud.) Even more telling, the dowmga -- the lady ork at the center of each household, its commander in times of peace, its insurance that orks keep on living -- will likely die during the harsh Ghurthan winter because of the player's greediness. And then the ork combat monster is likely to die during the next winter himself because he has no winter home to protect him. *Orkworld* is not a land of individuals. It is an orkum, one vast tribe, with all its parts interconnected and dependent upon one another. What few rules there are enforce this mightily. Even combat becomes easier when the orks fight together -- and this is enforced rules-wise not just in penalties for the besieged, but bonuses for the orks, too.

Another sure sign of maturity (or brokenness, if you come from a rules-lawyer campaign) is the "no-skills-but-the-ones-you-create" policy. Wick puts forward a very small list of skills that he and his players came up with themselves, but the primary policy is for each ork to obey his sense of internal consistency. The GM is expected to enforce this. In fact, the GM is expected to enforce many things. Wick readily admits that "players who feel an obligation to try to break this game system will be successful every time." But true to Wick form, he adds that "*Orkworld* wasn't designed for players who want to make one-sided walking cuisinarts. If that's what you want, go play something else with people who give a hopping hobbit how big your character sheet is."

Even the World Map, appearing in the "Places" section, is left up to the maturity of *Orkworld*'s players. Cities, holy places, mysterious forests and profane places are described and named, but none are actually placed on the map. The intent is for the players and GM to place everything themselves, to locate the tribe's holdings, the monsters, and the other orks into places on the map that will influence their relationships with each other. Given the number of purely evil and haunted places that Wick describes, especially when compared with the numbered of endangered good places, just the structuring of Ghurtha will require some weighty decision-making by the players.

This is not to say that the GM has to come up with everything in *Orkworld*. In the "Places" section just described, each of the places comes with at least one adventure hook -- sometimes several. Another of the many amazing things that appear in the "Game" section is an in-depth look at the ork Winter Home. Being a culture based upon the food source and war-animal reindeer, the orks are migratory. However, Ghurtha's winters are utterly unforgiving for eight months of the year, and thus the orks stay put in a permanent "Winter Home." For the purposes of gaming those eight months of the year, Wick offers an entire set of rolls for the GM to make (and a chart to walk the GM through it) for all of Winter's activities. Most games just assume that the players will make it through the winter sitting on their thumbs (or, like Vampire, largely ignore the fact that it's winter altogether). In *Orkworld*, the players are of necessity involved in the most intimate goings-on of day-to-day survival. There are rolls to determine which dowmgas get pregnant, and whether they survive the births. Rolls to determine the amounts and kinds of game brought home by the thraka (and a point system to determine if it's enough to prevent starvation for the tribe). Rolls to determine the crafts that can be made. Rolls to determine who falls in love and for how long. Rolls to determine which monsters attack -- and in *Orkworld*, dwarves, men, and elves are *all* monsters. But the beautiful part of Wick's Winter Home system (which a GM may take advantage of or not, totally at his discretion) is that it fits into exactly five pages. Five. And also in those same five pages are no fewer than 18 freebie adventure hooks.

Wick's greatest strength is that he never uses dice at the expense of content. Where dice are used, it's to help the GM rather than hurt him. And if the players use dice, it's to save themselves from the GM's lucky streak. It is impossible in *Orkworld* for a player to mistake weapon choice for character development. The success or failure of *Orkworld* rests squarely on the GM and players to use the abundance of information placed before them, and to use it without tripping over themselves because they're expecting the dice to save them.

However, there is a caveat to *Orkworld*. I mention it only because I'm a former English major, and am driven quite insane by this sort of thing. I've already mentioned the titling snafu, the "Culture" section being named "Ork" in the Table of Contents. But the problems don't stop there. Just barely into the "Culture" section, a duplicated page in the content renders every page after it exactly two pages off from the Table of Contents. It also renders them two pages away from the pull-quotes that appear inside the decorative bar in the header space. Looking for the page marked in the header as "Notes"? It appears two pages before the actual Notes content. Thankfully there are large headings and such within the content, or the situation might get desperate. Also appearing at the back of the "Culture" section are endnotes which, true to form, are off. There is a note-marker for number ix, but no note -- hence, all the notes' content is shifted up by one. Close readers will also become annoyed by the frequency with which "above" and "below" problems surface in the text. If the text says that a certain table or definition "appears below," take that with a grain of salt. Quite often it's in the exact opposite direction. There are also a fair number of inconsistencies in name-spelling. In the combat section, for example, an ork named "Taldoona" in one sentence becomes "Tooldana" in the next; a dragon's name goes from having two sets of single o's to two sets of double o's; and so on.

A larger problem is the fluctuation in voice. Wick seems unable to stay within his ork mindset, and at times pops out with 20th century Earth jargon. It's jarring at best to have a fine point of ork culture exemplified by how far human beings stand back from each other at the ATM. And while his scientifically sound explanation of how orks achieve photosynthesis through their skin is interesting, it's destructive to the emotion evoked by those same orks fighting dwarven steel with doomed bronze spearheads. It's all very interesting if you're a Wick column fan, but given that most of the book is pretty well "in voice" rather than out, in retrospect the Wick-isms become disappointing.

All English major sniping aside, *Orkworld* is a very good addition to my shelf of RPGs. There are very few authors whose love for their subjects shine as brightly as Wick's. Obsession might be a closer word in fact; it takes a fanatical sort of lover to see so many of the tiny details that would make his beloved's friends uncomfortable to read about. But it's the discomfort here that reminds us why we're playing this game. We're orks. We've eaten the hearts of our fallen friends. Our tents are sewn with their tendons. There are monsters at the door, and our dowmga urges us against them. Let others tell our story.

-- Kathryn Martens

Memory

As Rod Serling might say, "Picture this:"

- When I asked both my players if they'd read my column last week, they both said yes; they remembered really liking it, but they couldn't remember what it was about. Several long minutes later they were finally able to conjure the topic. (Of course, my secret purpose of writing last week's column was to interrogate my players to determine what the heck their motivations are for my *Aberrant* campaign.)
- A couple of weeks ago our *Fading Suns* GM asked for a summary of what happened the previous adventure, a mere two weeks earlier. It took some prompting to remind me of the big pivotal choice that my character had to make, despite almost being in tears at the time.
- My one time playing a live action game, one of the other players broke the Big Rule and grabbed me by my T-shirt. The adrenaline rush ensured that I remembered that moment, and I know I did something to anger his character, but for the life of me I don't know what, exactly, caused that event.
- A full year into my first Supers campaign I revealed a big plot element that had been dangling from the first session. Fortunately everyone remembered what I was alluding to, and it was a highly memorable "Old Man Peterson!" moment.

Now, this isn't a column about what makes games memorable (I'm not feeling that all-knowing this week). Instead it's a column about how powerful, yet fickle, memory is.

Presuming you're running or playing in a game with any sort of continuity, you're going to have lots of things you need to remember. Some aren't going to have much effect on the game ("Oh, yeah; I have a parrot. Um, I guess I left it on board the ship before we went scuba-diving."), but some are. ("Oh, I just remembered my character has scotophobia. I guess that puts a different spin on this whole spelunking expedition . . . ") Some things you'll conveniently and/or purposefully forget. ("Say, doesn't the President have the Ark of the Covenant?" "Uh . . . maybe.") Some incidents will have the players (or characters) talking about them forever.

If there's anything I've learned, it's how unreliable memory is. As a GM, I've had adventures implode in the first five minutes because the characters remembered an important fact that had dribbled out of my brain. I've also had adventures fizzle completely when I relied on the players remembering something they'd long since forgotten.

Now, in ye olde dungeon-crawling days, memory often wasn't anywhere *near* as important. You entered the Dungeon of Werdna, killed the Monster at the End of the Book, and went on to the next dungeon. But as games got more complex, story-oriented, and farther removed from their wargaming roots, the need for story-telling elements escalated . . . and many of these elements require memory.

Unfortunately, the elements that have plagued gamers forever -- a lack of time, 40+ hour a week jobs, and plenty of real world obligations -- all conspire to take their toll on the memories of gamers. To that end, here's a few tips I try to incorporate into my games to make sure memory is my friend, not my nemesis.

- **Recap.** At the beginning of each adventure, we always summarize what happened the last time (unless it's the first session of a campaign, of course). This gives me, as a GM, a chance to recount important elements from the previous meeting for the players. This is also a good time to bring up any dangling plot threads. ("And Dr. Kasper, your father is still in jail. His parole hearing is coming up next month, though.")
- **Put it in writing.** I love handouts (both as a GM and a player), and I tend to provide them for most important adventures. I've used lots of different types of handouts: fake newspaper articles, lists and descriptions of characters for complex mysteries, timelines of complicated events, copies of prophetic poems, "thank you" cards from folks who turn up dead, and so on. Not every handout is vital to the overall story, and not everything vital to the overall story is represented by a handout, but reminding them the mayor was kidnapped is easier if they have the ransom note.
- **Work in reverse.** Rather than trying to ensure your players remember plot points, why not consider building plot points around things your players remember? If you find your players quoting the throw-away mousy

librarian NPC, who kept offering them coffee on the sly, why not *let* them have a greater role in the grand scheme (for good or ill)? This ploy won't always work, of course, but it can definitely be something to consider if your players remember your flavor text more than the Seven Riddles of Creation.)

- **Repetition.** It works for *Seseme Street*, and it can work here, too. If it's important, and you want your players to remember it, make sure you repeat the information: verbatim, in multiple forms, from different people . . . whatever's necessary. Thus if Monstro the Monstrous's only weakness is gold, then it may not be enough to have it run away from the woman wearing the gold watch. Once he flees, emphasize its weakness by saying, " 'It's a good thing you all showed up,' says the bystander as she adjusts her jewelry." If the bad guy can only be defeated in one-on-one combat, make *sure* he gloats, "All of you together cannot defeat me! Ha ha ha . . . " at least four or five times. If the fact that the butler is left-handed is important, make sure he's picking up objects left and . . . um . . . left.

Memory is a funny thing; some of my adventure notes I look over and can't comprehend what I was thinking at the time. Other times my players reminisce about an adventure I'd meant as a "can't think of anything else this week" throwaway. Still other plot elements I know I can return to at any time, since my players have quoted the relevant information (unknowing to them) years later. Memory is something we all need to compensate for, but the extra effort can definitely be worth it.

* * *

Last week's answer: ***Kithbook: Nockers*** (for ***Changeling***), p. 19

(Two stars) "Tallahassee was almost entirely razed in 2016, and the capital was moved to Los Disneys, now the most important city in Florida."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

by Bob Portnell

Art by Dan Smith

Updated April 2004

One of the less-used benefits of a subscription to *Pyramid* or *JTAS* is access to the Pyramid Chat MOO. Apart from being a fun hangout for like-minded gamers and the official venue for company chats, the Pyramid Chat MOO also features several complete and functional "game rooms," allowing you to bring your tabletop game experience online. While the pace of give-and-take is somewhat slower . . . face it, most of us can't type nearly as fast as we talk! . . . the experience is usually at least as good as any conventional in-person game session.

However, many people find the array of commands and locales within the MOO intimidating. Thus, this guide provides clear listing and explanation of the most common commands (or "verbs") a visitor to Pyramid Chat will need, as well as a survey of the game room tools. It is derived from online helps provided by Steve Jackson Games and by the developers of the underlying LambdaMOO software. This is nowhere near a complete listing of actions, but it will do for most casual purposes.

Setting Up

You must be a current subscriber of *Pyramid* or *JTAS* to log in. If you are using a MOO/MUD client software, you'll need to know that the Pyramid chat server is located at pyramid.sjgames.com:2323. If you don't want the extra client software (links can be found at http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/chat.html), you can use the link to the Java client found on those pages. Naturally, your browser needs to be Java-enabled.

However you choose to connect, the first thing you have to give is the connect command:

```
connect [username] [password]
```

(Note that I'm leaving an implied "return" at the end of these command lines.) This is the same username and password you use to login to the magazine. Once logged in, you will be deposited into the Pyramid Lobby. This is where casual chat is on-going, and there are often interesting people about with whom you might converse.

Self-Identification

The Chat Areas give several options for how you "appear" to others. By default, your "player name" is the same as the username you used to log into *Pyramid*. Your username never changes unless you make special arrangements with the webmasters to change it. However, your player name can be changed any number of ways.

`@rename me to [newname]`

changes your "player name" throughout the entire MOO. It's permanent until changed again, but does not affect the username/password you used to log in.

`@desc me as " . . . ."`

changes the description which others see when they "look" at you.

`look`

lets you see the description of the room you are in, the topic for the room, and who and what are in the room with you.

`look [name]`

lets you see the description of the person named.

`look [object]`

lets you see additional info about some object in the room.

`@doing me is " . . . ."`

lets you customize some information in the 'who' display (below).

`who`

lets you see who is currently logged into the MOO, for how long they've been logged in, how long it's been since they last typed something, which room they are in, and what they're doing.

`@messages`

Several customized verbs have been built into your MOO user identity. You can view your current settings for interacting with these verbs by typing @messages me. You can change an individual message by typing verbname me is "[message]". Notice that the MOO automatically prefixes your player name on the @messages, except for the @connect and @disconnect messages. You have added flexibility for these two messages; you can write your name anywhere in the message. This is all relatively advanced, and many visitors never bother with changing their default @messages.

`plan [username]`

Lets you see any messages that user might have left about his plans, schedule or expected routine. Type help plan for more on this feature and how to set your own plan.

`@quit`

disconnects you. Bye-bye!

Exploring the Pyramid

The Lobby is the heart of informal discussion in the Pyramid Chat; the Auditorium (see below) is the center of formal events; and the third floor game room host online play. Beyond that there are many, rooms within the Pyramid (and even a few sights to be seen outside). Steven Ehrbar is the current keeper of the [Unofficial Map](); while most of the spaces are open for anyone to enter, please exercise discretion and courtesy when entering spaces identified as personal offices. Areas of special interest:

The Pinnacle: The twenty-third level of the Pyramid features an unparalled view of the surrounding Metaverse. It is also restricted to *Pyramid* subscribers only; *JTAS* subscribers cannot enter.

Brubek's: This restaurant is familiar throughout the Third Imperium for its beer, onion rings, and for being familiar throughout the Third Imperium. *Pyramid* subscribers cannot enter here.

Programming: Once nominally the hub for managing the chat area programming, this room is now the de facto retreat for Steve Jackson Games staff. Only staff members have access to this space.

The Dungeon: Once the privacy area for a now-retired Steve Jackson Games e-zine, this foul chamber is now open for all to inspect.

Basic Communication

Face it: For one reason or another, you're here to chat. These are the commands you will use most. They work in any room in the chat MOO.

say [text message]
"[text message]

causes "text message" to be displayed to the room, preceded by "YourName says,"

For example, if I typed

say Hello, Everyone!

the room display would add the new line

BobP says, "Hello, Everyone!"

Notice that it adds a closing quote to the end of every Say message. Also, you would see

You say, "Hello, Everyone!"

Typing a double-quote as the first character means the same thing as writing the say verb.

directed say == ' [player] [text message]

This variation adds direction to the message, but it's still displayed to everyone in the room. If I typed

'James Hello, James

the room display would show

<pre style="color:blue">
BobP [to James]: Hello, James
</pre>

Notice this adds no quotation marks, and that it only works if that player is actually in the same room with you. The single open-quote is in the upper left of the PC keyboard.

<pre style="color:red">
whisper [text message] to [player]
w [text message] to [player]
</pre>

This sends a message to the player you specify, but does not tell the rest of the room about it. Very handy for communicating privately with fellow players or the game master. If James typed

<pre style="color:red">
whisper Hello, Bob to BobP
</pre>

I would see

<pre style="color:blue">
James whispers "Hello, Bob" to you.
</pre>

And no one else in the room would see this. The program will add quotation marks around your message.

<pre style="color:red">
page [player]= [text message]
p [player]=[text message]
</pre>

This does much the same thing as whisper, except your message can be sent from one room to another. The recipient will see a message reporting the sender's name and location, followed by the actual message. The program will add quotation marks around your message.

That covers what you can say and how to say it. How about what you do?

<pre style="color:red">
emote [action]
: [action]
</pre>

This prefixes your "action" with your player name. For example, if I typed

<pre style="color:red">
emote waves to the assembled, then draws a gun and opens fire.
</pre>

the room would see

<pre style="color:blue">
BobP waves to the assembled, then draws a gun and opens fire.
</pre>

Notice the colon is the shorthand symbol for the emote command. Also, this command will always put a space between your name and the action. For other actions, use

<pre style="color:red">
emote: [action]
:: [action]
</pre>

This works just like emote, except it omits the space after the player's name. If I type

<pre style="color:red">
: 's eyes fill with tears of shame at what he's done.
</pre>

the room sees:

<pre style="color:blue">
BobP 's eyes fill with tears of shame at what he's done.
</pre>

But if I type

<pre style="color:red">:: 's eyes fill with tears of shame at what he's done.</pre>

the room sees:

<pre style="color:blue">BobP's eyes fill with tears of shame at what he's done.</pre>

<pre style="color:red">whisper :[message] to [player]
w ::[message] to [player]
p [player]= :[message]
p [player]= ::[message]</pre>

These variations of whisper and page let you send emotes privately within the room (w) or from room to room (p). The recipient sees a whispered emote prefixed with "You sense . . ." followed by the normal output form of the emote; paged emotes are prefixed with "From afar, . . ." Single colons still have the space after your name; double colons omit this, just as with public emotes. Finally, the page shortcut form must be used; "page [player] :[message]" will not work.

* * *

<pre style="color:red">think [text message]</pre>

This is great fun for asides and speculations, in a "you say it, you do it" environment. They can't police what you think, right? So if I type:

<pre style="color:red">think This is stupid.</pre>

the room sees

<pre style="color:blue">BobP . o O (This is stupid.)</pre>

Notice the program adds the thought bubbles and the parentheses. If you wish to keep your thoughts private, don't use this command!

<pre style="color:red">@emit [text message]</pre>

This is the generic display command. It will repeat to the room display exactly the text message. If I type

<pre style="color:red">@emit The dragon eats James.</pre>

The room sees:

<pre style="color:blue">The dragon eats James.</pre>

Since there's no attribution of who made this statement, it can contribute to confusion. For this reason, use the @emit command sparingly and only for very good reason.

Auditorium Manners

Official chats are conducted in the Auditorium on the second floor of the Pyramid. Find your way there from the Pyramid Lobby by typing stairs or up; from anywhere else in the Pyramid, find your way to the Elevator and seek the second floor.

The Auditorium rules and documentation are posted in that room; type rules to see how moderated chats are conducted and how your conversations are affected when you are in the Auditorium.

Game Room Action

On the other hand, if you want to get right at the gaming business at hand, the dedicated game rooms in the Pyramid are on the third floor. From the Pyramid Lobby type

```
elevator
3
```

which will bring you to the third floor Game Rooms Lobby. From here, type the name of the game room you wish to enter. There are two multipurpose game rooms (the Game Commons and the Holodeck) and three *GURPS*-optimized rooms (the Green, Red and Blue rooms.)

The multipurpose game rooms have a fully hierarchical menu system; type help here to see the top level of the menu guide. In the GURPS rooms, help here gives you the entire set of helps for those rooms.

There are several versatile commands to assist gamemaster and players. In general, these only work in game rooms, although "roll" has been switched on for the entire chat area. And some of them only work if you are in a game room and have declared a "localname". Let's take a look at the basics of online play in the Pyramid.

```
@localname me as [newname]
@ln me as [newname]
```

changes your "player name" in the game room only. Your regular player name is still visible on the "who" directory. This is your character's name, basically.

```
@localdesc me as ". . . ."
@ld me as ". . . ."
```

changes the description which others see when they "look" at your localname. Your game character's description, in other words.

```
@localremove
@lrm
```

The local names and descriptions you create stay in the room where they are created . . . forever. Even after you've logged off. Even if you cancel your subscription, perish the thought. So, as a matter of courtesy and tidiness, please use this command to clear your local names and descriptions at the end of your game sessions.

```
@gm
```

tells you who is currently identified as the game master of the game room.

Here are two special commands for gamemasters use in game rooms:

```
@setgm me
@setgm [player]
```

Identifies yourself (or a player) as the GM. This shows when someone looks for the GM. Also, the GM sees every die roll made in the room and who made it. Notice that only someone /in/ the room can be made GM, but if the GM leaves the room . . . he /still/ sees what you're rolling.

Mapping

The SJ Games rooms are set up to accommodate a simple mapping procedure, allowing the gamemaster to create, modify and save maps of a simple square grid. The details of these functions are beyond the scope of this document; interested game masters should refer to the Short GURPS Help Note in the Pyramid Game Lobby.

Dice Rolling

`roll`

The basic command; shows the room you rolled the default dice, and the result. The default dice in the GURPS rooms are 3d6; in the multipurpose rooms, the default is set by the game master using verbs described in the "help setup" screen.

Example: In the Red Room, I type--

`roll`

The Room sees:

`BobP rolls 3d6, and gets a 10.`

You will see something slightly different, as would the game master. There are other permutations for using the roll command; see help roll for full details.

`@iroll`

This command rolls three separate six-sided dice, identifying the last as a "check die." Fans of *In Nomine* will recognize this as the infamous "d666." Note that everyone in the room sees the actions of this command; if you require privacy, you'll need to roll the success dice and the check die separately as private rolls.

The multipurpose game rooms include preprogramed rollers for many popular games and game systems; see the help dice in those rooms for a complete list.

The following commands from the *GURPS* rooms are predesigned to make 3d6 rolls, naturally.

`skill [t]`

Rolls 3d6 and compares to the target value, shows result to room. Identical to "roll t on 3".

`skill [t] [l]`

Rolls 3d6 and compares to the target value. Shows you and the GM the target, the roll, and whether or not you succeeded in your roll against the [l] labeled trait. Shows the room that your rolled against your [l] and whether you succeeded or no.

`qc [t1] [t2]`

A very handy tool for the game master. This does a quick contest on the two trait values listed.

And there you have it! Print this, keep it handy for a while . . . these will all become second nature in short order and you won't need this reference. Enjoy! And say "Hi!" to me when you visit; I'm here a lot more than I should be.

* * *

(Special thanks to Craig Roth, JHG Hendriks, Chat Coordinator Matt Doubles and the rest of the PyraMOO Regulars for their help.)

by Jeff Wikstrom

Art by Dan Smith

"Dependent built with 0 or fewer points: Possibly a young child or feeble older person." *GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition*, pg. 38.

GURPS offers a remarkable tool in the Dependents disadvantage. Friends and family especially are areas that most games don't delve far into; it's amazing how many player-characters seem to be orphaned only children whose only touch with the rest of humanity is the other PC's. The *GURPS* Dependents rules make for an excellent opportunity to expand a character's possibilities and add real depth to a campaign, making the fictional world three-dimensional.

While a small child or member of the elderly can certainly be built on zero or fewer points, those are hardly the only options. With a little creative effort and a willingness to compromise, interesting characters who are also productive members of society can be generated.

With a 0-point character, almost all the skills and advantages must come from disadvantage points, so the selection of disadvantages is the single most important step of the process. While his or her advantages and high attributes define a player-character, built on 100 or more points, a dependent must be distinctive on the basis of disadvantages. This isn't to say that 0-point characters must be totally useless; the point of this article is to demonstrate otherwise. It's important to remember, though, that every positive point spent must balance out with negatives.

The following are 0-point characters, suitable for use as dependents. Eleanor Polk and Steven Allen Dertzer violate the 40-point guideline on disadvantage points; they're extreme concepts. Jeanie Leary has 41 points of disadvantages, thanks to the uneven cost of Youth, but is actually a -1-point character. The remainder of the example characters are standard 0-point characters with 40 points of disadvantages. All skills are TL7, where appropriate; the characters have been created as dependents for a modern-day game set in the city of St. Louis. This is merely a default, however. Conversion suggestions (apart from the obvious alterations of Area Knowledge) can be found with each character.

One source of inspiration for this article is "Average Joes (and Janes)" by Brandon Cope, which appeared in Pyramid on October 1, 1999.

(Editor's note: You may also want to check out the sequel, "More Average Joes (and Janes)" from July 28, 2000.)

Eleanor Polk

Appearance: age 31, 5'8", 136 lbs., a slim, dark-haired woman wearing mirrorshades over her blind brown eyes.

ST: 9 [-10] **DX:** 12 [20] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 12 [20]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d-1 *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 6 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed: 6

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [2*], Charisma +3 [15], Empathy [15] (*half cost for Blindness)

Disadvantages: Blindness [-50], Brontophobia (severe) [-20], Charitable [-15], Generosity [-5], Pacifism (Total) [-30]

Quirks: Allergic to cats [-1], Dresses in one color at a time [-1], Enjoys classical music (played softly) [-1], Idolizes and emulates Gandhi [-1], Wears mirrorshades to conceal her blank gaze [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-13 [1], Chess**-14 [1], Computer Operation-14 [2], History-12 [2], Literature-14 [6], Knowledge (Classical music)**-16 [4], Meditation*-12 [2], Philosophy (karma yoga)-13 [4], Research-13 [2], Swimming-12 [1], Writing-14 [4] (*realistic version) (**hobby skill)

Languages: Braille-14 [4], English-13 (Native)

Ellie was an editor for a New York publisher, and on the fast track to success; everything was going her way. That all changed the day she was involved in the four-car highway accident that cost two people their lives and Ellie use of her eyes. To this day she can't stand loud noises. For several years Ellie was despondent, but eventually she was exposed to the teachings of Gandhi. His example in the face of adversity gave her a new lease on life, and today she makes a modest living writing with the assistance of specialized software on her computer. Ellie works out of her apartment, which is small and very sparsely furnished, except for her computer and sound system. Speech technology also allows her some access to the Internet.

Quote: "That sounds awful. It reminds me of the Mahatma's time in the South African prisons."

In ancient or medieval times (or a generic fantasy setting), Eleanor is the intellectual eldest daughter of a nobleman, who suffered great tragedy before she found religion. Replace her Philosophy and Meditation skills with Theology-14 [6], and replace Computer Operation, Research, four points to Literature and two points of Writing with Literacy [10]. She likely would wish to join a convent, but she is an only child, and her father demands she marry to secure the line.

In a science-fiction setting Ellie's blindness may be treatable, but her religious convictions and wealth both prevent that. Remove Brontophobia and add Poverty [-15], and change her Philosophy to an appropriate type.

Herman "Jiffy" Ross

Appearance: age 24, 5'9", 148 lbs., dark hair and eyes. Perpetually dressed in black slacks with a white shirt.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 11 [10] **IQ:** 11 [10] **HT:** 10 [0]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed: 5.25

Advantages: None

Disadvantages: Clueless [-10], Low Pain Threshold [-10], Obsession (his job) [-15], Workaholic [-5]

Quirks: Afraid of dogs [-1], Can't bear to think ill of a customer [-1], Devoted to waiting tables [-1], Quirk-level cowardice [-1], Uses bizarre words in conversation [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-11 [1], Diplomacy-11 [4], Driving (Automobile)-10 [1], Knowledge: Television*-12 [1], Merchant-11 [2], Savoir-Faire (servant)-18 [16]

Languages: English-11 (Native)

Herman (please, call him Jiffy!) is a waiter at a medium-quality restaurant, and this is the single defining fact of his existence. Ever since "Jiffy" was a small child, he knew what he wanted to do in life, and now he does it. He loves his work, which may make him unique among the waiters of the world. With a song in his heart and a dance in his step he serves his customers, and no one is happier than he.

In his limited free time Jiffy reads widely if not deeply, and has an exceptionally large vocabulary, mainly of adjectives. "Half-as-perfect," "Tickety-boo," "bootless," and "slithey" all receive regular use in his speech.

Quote: "Gloriously, we offer not one, not two, but three different kinds of cheese on our hamburgers. Do you think you would prefer the bitingly-sharp cheddar, the taliaferric Swiss, or the just tickety-boo monterey jack?"

Herman's niche is one which can be found in a wide variety of settings (although sadly not all: *GURPS Dinosaurs*, for example). He is thus essentially the same in all versions, although his Driving and Television skills would need to be replaced with local equivalents (Riding and Knowledge: Folk Music, possibly), as would his unique slang.

Steven Allen Dertzer

Appearance: age 53, 5'9", 283 lbs., balding red hair, blue eyes. An obese man in a Hawaiian shirt, typing at a terminal.

ST: 9 [-10] **DX:** 9 [-10] **IQ:** 13 [30] **HT:** 8 [-15]
Damage *Swing:* 1d-1 *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 0 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed: 4.25 (0.25 with Fat encumbrance)

Advantages: Collected [5], Voice [10], Wealth: Comfortable (x2) [10]

Disadvantages: Addiction (tobacco) [-5], Age (53) [-9], Bad Back [-15], Fat [-20], Unfit (Very) [-15]

Quirks: Hates public transportation [-1], Keeps his hair short [-1], Moderately lecherous [-1], Uses the expression "over the hill" whenever he refers to someone even a year older than he is; has done this for years [-1], Wears loud clothing [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-12 [1/2], Astronomy-11 [1], Chemistry-11 [1], Computer Hacking-12 [4], Computer Programming-17 [12], Computer Operation-14 [2], Chess*-14 [1], Electronics Operation (Audio Equipment)-15 [6], History-11 [1], Law-11 [1], Literature-11 [1], Mathematics-13 [4], Performance-16 [4], Philosophy (Aristotelian)-11 [1], Physics-12 [2], Research-12 [1], Speed Reading-12 [1], Swimming-13 [1/2], Teaching-13 [2], Typing-13 [1], Writing-13 [2] (*hobby skill)

Languages: English-13 (Native)

Steven works at a software company, in the programming division. He's well-read, moderately wealthy, and has an encyclopedic store knowledge and a healthy yen to learn. However, that's the only healthy thing about him: he suffers from an unfortunate glandular condition, is extremely out of shape, and has a trick back. He telecommutes because he can't stand public transportation and he can't fit in a car. His hobby is his radio: he runs a low-watt AM station out of his garage, which, despite its intermittent broadcasting schedule, boasts an unusually large following.

Quote: "Hmm . . . now where do I want to go today?"

In ancient/medieval/fantasy times, Steven is a sage widely reknowned. Replace the Voice advanatage with Literacy and the Electronics, Performance, Typing, and various Computer skills with more points in scientific skills. A science-fiction version of Steven could take on a variety of forms, depending on the nature of the setting. One possibility would be to remove his technical skills, using the points to buy Wealthy [10 more points], Reputation (as a media personality, a small bonus from most people most of the time), skills to match, and remove the Age disadvantage (to reflect the longer lifespans of higher-TL cultures), making Steven a media outlet in his own right.

Ted Havershack

Appearance: age 27, 6'1", 157 lbs., dirty blond hair and hazel eyes; a tall guy in cheap clothing reading a comic book.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 9 [-10] **IQ:** 12 [20] **HT:** 11 [10]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed: 5

Advantages: None

Disadvantages: Berserk [-15], Bloodlust [-10], Code of Honor (generic "nice guy") [-5], Sense of Duty (friends and family) [-5], Stubbornness [-5]

Quirks: Dislikes people who belittle comic books [-1], Dresses in bland clothing [-1], Likes comic books [-1], Slouches [-1], Has no ethical problem with mooching off relatives [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-15 [6], Carousing-11 [2], Chemistry-12 [4], Comic Books*-13 [1], Driving (Automobile)-10 [4], Mathematics-10 [1], Physics-11 [2], Research-10 [1/2], Role-Playing Games*-14 [2], Streetwise-10 [1/2], Writing-12 [2] (*hobby skill)

Languages: English-12 (Native)

Ted did pretty well in college, majoring in chemistry. After that, though, he revealed he had no interest in finding a job; instead, he lives with his relatives.

He isn't a bad guy, but had a lot of problems growing up; he has very poor anger control. He's taken several rage-management classes, but still finds that the best way to avoid breaking into violence is avoiding contact with the world at large. Thus, his seclusion in his parents' basement.

Quote: "Hey! No way that guy could survive that blast! This movie was made by idiots! Stupid movie! STUPID TAPE! *STUPID VCR!*"

If the game's setting includes feudalism, Ted is a serf who fled his manor. Remove his skills, except for Area Knowledge, Carousing, and Streetwise, and give him Semi-Literacy [5] and skills such as Animal Handling and Agronomy (to reflect his past) and Hiking and Brawling (indicative of his current status as wanderer). A future-Ted is much the same as modern-Ted, although the focus of his attention is likely to be shifted away from comic-books and roleplaying games, toward some other, equally vapid, pursuit.

Susan Roosevelt

Appearance: age 25, 5'6", 112 lbs., thin platinum blonde hair, watery blue eyes: an unkempt, scraggly girl in black and white clothing, playing chess with herself.

ST: 9 [-10] **DX:** 8 [-15] **IQ:** 14 [45] **HT:** 10 [0]
Damage *Swing:* 1d-1 *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 4 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a

Speed: 4.5

Advantages: None

Disadvantages: Loner [-5], Low Empathy [-15], Odious Personal Habit (drones about chess) [-5], Sense of Duty (Friends) [-5], Shy [-5], Unattractive (nerdy) [-5]

Quirks: Does crossword puzzles [-1], Likes to dress in black and white [-1], Sometimes wears piano glasses [-1], Tries to turn any conversation to chess [-1], Unconcerned with her appearance [-1]

Skills: Accounting-12 [1], Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-14 [1], Chess*-28 [14], Computer Operation-14 [1], Driving (Automobile)-9 [0], Mathematics-15 [6], Merchant-9 [1], Speed Reading-13 [1] (*hobby skill)

Languages: English-14 (Native)

Susan is a shelver in a large used-bookstore, and also handles finances. She was a mathematics major in college, with a scholarship, but after getting a master's degree decided it was a dead-end field. Her real passion is chess: she's a ranked member of the American Chess Federation and reads voraciously every book on the subject she can find.

She doesn't get along very well with other people, however; sales drop considerably whenever she's working the register. When she's not working, Susan is either at a chess club meeting or in her dingy apartment.

Quote: "Uh-huh. Are you going to buy that, or just disfigure it?"

In a setting without chess, Susan isn't likely to appear . . . . An appropriately cinematic Arabian Nights game might feature her as a harem-girl from a faroff land, for nights when the Calpih perfers an intellectual challenge. Remove her Accounting, Computer, Mathematics, Merchant, and Speed Reading skills to replace Unattractive with Attractive (a 10 point shift). Lower her Chess skill to 24 [10], and add Professional Skill: Courtesan-15 [4]. She can be transplanted, as is, into any science-fiction setting with both bookstores and chess.

Ronald Nimble

Appearance: age 23, 5'7", 143 lbs., dark hair and eyes; a good-looking guy behind the wheel of a pizza delivery car, speeding.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 11 [10] **IQ:** 10 [0] **HT:** 9 [-10]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed:: 5

Advantages: Absolute Direction [5], Attractive [5]

Disadvantages: Compulsive Lying [-15], Laziness [-10], Poor [-15]

Quirks: Always has a joke ready [-1], Drives unusually fast [-1], Gets offended when people don't believe him (whether he's telling the truth or not!) [-1], Keeps the radio tuned to rap [-1], Light drinker [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-13 [6], Bard-11 [4], Darts-14 [8], Driving (Automobile)-13 [8], Fast-Talk-12 [6], History-7 [1/2], Performance-10 [2], Writing-8 [1/2]

Languages: English-10 (Native)

Ron is a pizza delivery boy in St. Louis. It's about the only job he can hold down: he knows the city as well as he knows the inside of his apartment, and he's an excellent driver. He tried other things: college, the corporate world, etc., but his habitual lying kept getting in the way. So far it hasn't been a problem at the pizzeria, but it may just be a matter

of time. Add to this the way Ron avoids hard work as much as possible, and it's a real recipe for chronic unemployment.

The only thing Ron seems willing to work for is his darts game; he was runner-up for All-City Champion last year, and hopes to win in the next tournament.

Quote: "Well, I was on my way over here, with your pizza, when all of the sudden this van just came out of nowhere . . ."

A low-ranking member of the generic-fantasy Thieves' Guild, Ron can often be found skulking on the streets of Generic Fantasy City. Replace his Darts, Driving, History, and Writing skills with a mix of Thief/Spy skills; a few points in a wide mix of skills is more appropriate than specializing, but Ron could fill virtually any function for the Guild.

Jeanie Leary

Appearance: age 15, 5'2", 108 lbs., brown hair dyed black, brown eyes: a small girl in trendy clothing.

ST: 7 [-20] **DX:** 11 [10] **IQ:** 11 [10] **HT:** 10 [0]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d-3 *Thrust:* 1d-3
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** 6 **Block:** n/a
Speed: 5.25

Advantages: Absolute Timing [5], Lightning Calculator [5], Mathematical Ability [10]

Disadvantages: Epilepsy [-30], Sense of Duty (Family) [-5], Youth (-3) [-6]

Quirks: Considers piercings passe [-1], Defensive about epilepsy [-1], Enthusiastic fan of pop music and MTV [-1], Mocks dorks so people will know she's not one [-1], Tries to look older than she is [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (St.Louis)-11 [1], Computer Operation-11 [1], Fast-Talk-12 [4], Judo-10 [2], Knowledge (MTV and pop music)*-16 [5], Knowledge (television)*-15 [4], Mathematics-16 [8], (*Hobby skill)

Languages: English-11 (Native)

Jeanie is a fifteen years old, and fairly normal, except for two things about her. The first is that she's a mathematical prodigy. She qualifies as a "gifted" child, and is involved regularly in math-related afternoon and summer programs at the university. Jeanie doesn't especially like math, but doesn't dislike it either. She does know she is very good at it, and is proud of her talent. Jeanie's second abnormality is her epilepsy. She suffers from a particularly bad form of the disease; she's acutely and irrationally embarrassed by this, as most teenage girls would be. She lives with relatives in St.Louis, where she is a freshman in high school. Jeanie's Judo skill rises from self-defense classes her father insisted she take (until they began to conflict with her differential equations classes).

Quote: "But Daaaad!"

An interesting variation on Jeanie for a fantasy game is a reluctant shaman. Replace Mathematical Ability with World Sight [10], and her Computer Operation, Judo, Knowledges, and Mathematics skills with Occultism-10 [1], Theology-9 [1], Dreaming-8 [1], two points in basic shamanistic magic spells, and Intuition [15]. In a science-fiction setting, the Mathematical Ability and Lightning Calculator advantages might be the result of Bio-Tech genetic engineering, with her Epilepsy an unwanted side effect.

Jack Blumen

Appearance: age 29,5'10", 159 lbs., blond hair, green eyes: a guy in a rumpled suit with a window seat, engrossed in a

spy novel.

ST: 10 [0] **DX:** 10 [0] **IQ:** 11 [10] **HT:** 11 [10]
Damage: *Swing:* 1d *Thrust:* 1d-2
Dodge: 5 **Parry:** n/a **Block:** n/a
Speed: 5.25

Advantages: Claim to Hospitality (various friends) [5], Cool [1]

Disadvantages: Chummy [-5], Code of Honor (professional ethics) [-5], Combat Paralysis [-15], Duty (to company: almost all the time but not usually hazardous) [-8], Sense of Duty (Friends and family) [-5]

Quirks: Loves greasy fast food [-1], Likes the color green [-1], Quirk-level insomniac [-1], Travels light and takes all his baggage carry-on [-1], Wears black socks with everything [-1]

Skills: Area Knowledge (Midwest)-12 [2], Area Knowledge (St. Louis)-11 [1], Carousing-11 [2], Computer Operation-11 [1], Driving (Automobile)-9 [1], Fast-Talk-11 [2], Merchant-14 [8]

Languages: English-11 (Native)

Jack's a commercial traveler, a salesman for a computer company. He's good, but not great. Somewhat surprisingly, he has a high level of job satisfaction: he loves travelling around, loves airports, loves that greasy fast food. He has friends in almost every city in the Midwest, which saves on hotel costs.

His only real hobby is reading thick airport novels; Jack has a weakness for Tom Clancy and John Le Carre. When he's not traveling, which isn't often, Jack has a small apartment in St. Louis and a cat.

Quote: "Hey, that's a nice laptop. Where'd you get it? Because if you're thinking of upgrading . . . "

Jack fits right into the Old West, becoming a salesman of bicycles or something similar, who plies his trade between the Missisippi and the Pecos. Trade Driving for Riding, and Computer Operation for Veterinary (Horse), but the remainder of the charcter can remain as is. He also falls easily into any SF setting with traveling salesmen.

The Words of Self: Demonic Epithets in In Nomine

by Eric Alfred Burns

The following is a suggestion for a non-canon variant to the Word rules for **In Nomine**.

"Hm, I thought as I dropped the kitty corpse into a burlap sack, tied it off and shoved it up into the chimney. I wonder if I could wrangle a promotion out of this mess? 'He Who Disfigures Small Animals?' I shook my head. Too over the top."
-- "Dark Dream," *In Nomine*, p.24.

Most Celestials, whether Angels or Demons, aspire to having Words of their own. They look to have a concept of the Symphony inexorably bound to their being, to embody a Word of their own forevermore, tying their fortunes to that Word's significance to all humanity. However, where Angels can only have Words, Demons have the possibility of promoting themselves as Words. A Demon can earn an Epithet.

Epithets are specialty Words. Even as a Demon reflects on his own personal Symphony to the exclusion of the universe, so can he actually exalt his personal Symphony, forcing the Symphony as a whole to acknowledge him in an act of supreme selfishness. Epithets are not as powerful as true Words -- instead of binding the Demon to a concept of the world, the Demon becomes forever associated with an action or distinguishing feature.

Epithets are declarations to the Symphony, announcing a specific feature of the Demon that the Demon is known for. Epithets are Words in Helltongue, even as other Words are, but they always follow the syntax of "He or She Who Performs A Task," when translated into other languages. So, instead of becoming the Demon of Knife Murders, a Calabite might become "He Who Strikes With Stilettoes" or "She Who Slashes Throats in the Night."

The Mechanics of Epithets

Epithets are far more restricted than true Words. Where a Word embodies a concept that can exist throughout the Symphony, an Epithet is a concept that sticks to the Demon himself. As such, Epithet-Bound Demons need to constantly reinforce their Epithet wherever possible, especially among other Demons. Instead of growing more powerful with the significance of the Concept to humanity and the Symphony, Epithet-Bound Demons become more powerful with greater fame (or infamy) for themselves. The more that He Who Scrambles Light and Fluffy Eggs becomes known in Shal Mari as a breakfast chef, the more powerful he can potentially become.

The problem is the fickleness of fame. Say Jequil, "He Who Strikes Down Malakim Where They Stand," destroys a powerful Malakite of War in a battle he was expected to lose, and the Media broadcasts the fight throughout Hell. Jequil returns to Hell with great pomp and majesty, and as the throngs cheer his name (or at least know of his deed), he feels the Epithet swell in power inside him. Well, the day after his return, Jequil is yesterday's news and no one wants to hear it all again. In order to maintain his strength and position, Jequil needs to get back to Earth and take out some more Malakim. Ofanim won't count

unless they're filler (that boost his legend) in between Malakim.
Jequil's Epithet specifically refers to killing Malakim, and so
he's got to constantly promote his image as a Malakim killer to
effect longer term Epithet growth. Only when his deeds are so
well known that his reputation persists even after a few days can Jequil begin to relax. Even then, he will constantly be looking for Malakim to kill, lest he lose ground in Hell's communal consciousness.

Epithets follow the general rules for Words in the *Game Master's Guide*, pp.21-33. In particular, Epithets gain and lose Word-Forces the same way that regular Words do, by gaining and losing importance in the Symphony. The advantages to Epithets are twofold -- first, a smaller or more discrete population can have a greater than normal effect; a powerful Demon with a well known Epithet in Hell can gain enough Word-Forces to become a Significant or Important Word (in Forces and power, at least) where a full Word-Bound Demon would need to make an impact on the Symphony as a whole. If a Demon's Epithet becomes known in the Corporeal realm (by Humanity), his power can swell quickly indeed. Secondly, an Epithet can be frivolous in nature and still yield significant power. The Demon of Dandruff Chunks In Brushes will have a Trivial Word unless a major miracle occurs. "She Who Leaves Chunks of Dandruff in Peoples' Brushes" can become quite powerful if her exploits become well known. As with Words, an Epithet-Bound Demon may count his Epithet's Word-Forces when figuring out how much Essence the Demon can hold. Further, Demons with five or more Epithet Word-Forces may receive a new rite related to his Epithet. With ten or more Epithet Word-Forces, a demon may receive a second rite and actually give one of his rites to Servitors. (Servitors of an Epithet-Bound Demon are generally called Groupies by their fellows, and have little status in Hell.)

Furthermore, even as the metaphoric meaning and associations of Words can expand their significance (and the Word-Bound's power), Epithet-Bound can use their Epithets metaphorically as well. So, Westa, "She Who Beats A Dead Horse," can keep her Epithet fueled by publicly clubbing fallen stallions, but she can also keep her reputation alive by loudly championing causes long after their issues have closed.

The disadvantages of Epithets over Words are many, however. First off, while it is easy to promote one's Epithet, it is a constant process. If an Epithet-bound Demon fails to reinforce his reputation as it relates to his Epithet among those who know of him, he will lose Word-Forces quickly. Further, even as a Word-Bound Demon can be destroyed if his Word is destroyed, so can an Epithet-Bound Demon be destroyed if his reputation is destroyed. If Alania, "She Who Dominates C.E.O.'s," makes a Balseraph her enemy, that Balseraph can spread rumors and false evidence showing that Alania is actually submissive with C.E.O.s or never met any in the first place. Even if untrue, the damage to Alania's reputation can strip her of Word-Forces as per p.28 of the *Game Master's Guide* -- even to Alania's own destruction. And finally, while Epithets can yield rites, they are not true Words and therefore Epithet-Bound Demons never receive special Attunements or Powers related to their Epithet.

Epithets and Words

Obviously, an Epithet is considered inferior to a Word. While an Epithet is the purest expression of a Demon's own selfish vanity, it can't compare with embodying a true concept in the Symphony. However, an Epithet still represents being set above one's fellows and a significant increase of power and prestige in Hell. Furthermore, Epithets can be expanded into true Words the same way that Words can be expanded into more powerful ones (as per Word-Promotion, *GMG* p.30). Indeed, when two or more candidates for an Infernal Word all prove to be worthy of the Word, Lucifer will often give all the candidates Epithets related to that Word, instead. So when there is a contest for

the Word of Tormenting Small Animals, a Impudite might become "He Who Disfigures Small Animals," and a Djinn might become "She Who Maims Small Animals," while a Habbalite becomes "He Who Tortures Small Animals." Lucifer then generally keeps an eye on the various Epithet-Bound. The one who best promotes his Epithet (if he's lucky) then gets promoted into the Demon of Tormenting Small Animals. His former Epithet is absorbed into the true Word and no longer applies. And those Epithet-Bound who competed with the new Word-Bound Demon all become de facto servitors of that Demon, as their Epithets require them to promote his Word.

Of course, both Lucifer's ire and his fabled sense of humor can fall upon Demons through Epithets as easily (or more easily) than through true Words. Epithets are clearly easier to grant after all, requiring less power. So Lucifer might humiliate a Demon with an Epithet ("She Who Seduces Cattle," "He Who Enjoys Licking Balseraphs' Boots Clean," and the like) or actually use an impossible Epithet to destroy an offensive Demon entirely. One Calabite who offended Lucifer was given the Epithet "He Who Slays Archangel Michael Celestially." The newly Epithet-Bound Demon then had to either try to slay the Archangel of War in Celestial Combat or let his reputation for slaying Michael fall away to nothing, causing his destruction.

Demon Princes and the Epithet-Bound

An Epithet-Bound Servitor is in a unique position for a Prince. It's not enough that they perform actions that fuel their reputations. Their actions have to become known to a sufficient population to fuel their reputations. As a result, Demon Princes have a lot of leverage with the Epithet-Bound. By controlling their access to the throngs who revere (or fear) them, they can control how strong their Servitors' Epithets are.

Of course, a Servitor's Epithet often fuels his Superior's Word anyhow, and that Servitor's fame will also work to strengthen the Prince's Word, so it's often in the Prince's best interests to promote his Servitor's Epithet. And Servitors who aren't promoted by their Prince will start finding ways around their Prince to strengthen their Epithets -- which their Prince's enemies will exploit wherever they can.

Angels and the Epithet-Bound

Angels can't be bound to Epithets. The supreme act of selfishness involved in declaring yourself a concept in the Symphony is alien to the essential selflessness of Heaven, and the Seraphim Council would never even attempt such a thing. (It is thought that the attempt would fail, regardless.) Epithet-Bound are generally Heaven's adversaries, as a result. It is a mixed blessing, since knowledge of a Demon's Epithet usually tips Angels off as to the Demon's intentions. When "He Who Sets Fires To Convents" comes to town, the Angels of the area know to set guards at the area's Nunneries, for example. However, the driving need for Demons to feed their Epithets make them dangerous opponents.

And some Demons have gotten very good at aggravating Angels, specifically to build a reputation in Heaven. After all, if the Heavenly Host makes a concerted effort to prevent the Demon from following through on his Epithet, then his reputation among them grows and so does the power of his Epithet.

Epithets in the Campaign

In an infernal or mixed campaign, Demon PCs may compete for Epithets as stepping stones to true Words. Princes and Princesses can also sponsor a PC for an Epithet as a reward for exceptional service (or to sidetrack a too ambitious PC's quest for more general power.) Epithets become a new level of reward and prestige between a Distinction and a Word, and a well thought out Epithet can enhance a PC's capacity for role playing.

If a PC gains an Epithet, it is up to the Game Master to determine how strong the PC's reputation is among the different populations who know about it, and therefore how many Word-Forces the PC has at any given time. If after several adventures the PC has done little to reinforce his reputation, the Game Master should reduce his Word Forces accordingly.

In an angelic campaign, Epithet-Bound become dangerous adversaries -- powerful demons with very specific agendas they're unlikely to bend on. An entire mission or series of missions can surround foiling an Epithet-Bound from performing the tasks necessary to fuel his Epithet.

Sample Epithet-Bound Character

FORCAS

"He Who Pours Salt into Wounds"
Habbalite Knight of the Black Order

Corporeal Forces -- 4 Strength 10   Agility 6
Ethereal Forces -- 4 Intelligence 8 Precision 8
Celestial Forces -- 5 Will 12   Perception 8

Suggested Word Forces: 9
Vessel: Adult Human Male/4, Adult Human Female/2
Role: "Major Corbin Rathbone," Military History Professor/3 (Status: 3)
Skills: Chemistry/5, Climbing/2, Dodge/2, Emote/3, Fast-Talk/3, Knowledge (Military History/3), Medicine/2, Ranged Weapon (Pistol/4, Rifle/4), Savoir-Faire/1, Small Weapon (Knife/3), Survival/2, Tactics/3, Throwing/3
Songs: Charm (Celestial/3), Dreams (Corporeal/3, Celestial/2), Numinous Corpus (Acid/3, Claws/2, Fangs/2, Horns/2, Tongue/5)
Attunements: Djinn of the War, Habbalah of the War, Art of Combat, Knight of the Black Order
Special Rite: Manage to introduce an actual salt into a corporeal injury without being caught doing it.

Forcas is an old and powerful demon in Baal's service. He has been loyal throughout his career, truly seeing Baal as the Rebel Champion who challenges the soft and weak Heavenly Host in the name of a purer, stronger God. And, over the centuries of service to Baal, Forcas has had many opportunities to test humanity and find it wanting.

While a strong warrior in his own right, Forcas delighted in tormenting soldiers who weren't strong enough to meet the battle. Finding that soldiers too injured to continue the fight failed the acid test of strength in battle, Forcas naturally demeaned them. After breaking the morale of any number of human soldiers following horrible injuries, Baal decided to reward his effective Servitor, sponsoring him for the Epithet of "He Who Pours Salt into Wounds." Lucifer concurred and Forcas gained his Epithet.

Today, Forcas diligently builds his reputation for kicking the weak when they're down. While he doesn't eschew literally salting bloody injuries (which led him to study both first aid and chemistry), he works far more effectively by exploiting embarrassments or mental anguish, adding insult to injury in ways that make a person's suffering intolerable. To that end, his current Role is as a Military History teacher at a Military Academy. "Major Corbin Rathbone" is subject to recall into the Army should it be necessary (and Baal want it), but mostly he works with students at his strict, one might say harsh military school. He is known for being a tyrant in his class, demeaning students who do poorly and questioning any signs of weakness publicly, turning natural concerns and homesickness into excruciating public humiliation. His reputation among the student body keeps his Epithet strong, as does the number of demons Baal sends through his school as part of building their Roles. These demons leave the school and spread Forcas's reputation throughout Baal's organization in Hell and on Earth, keeping "He Who Pours Salt into Wounds" strong.

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Pick

Deluxe Hero Wars RPG

Published by [Issaries, Inc.](#)

Created by Robin Laws, Greg Stafford, Roderick Robertson, Shannon Appel, and others

Boxed set containing *Roleplaying in Glorantha* (256 pgs), *Narrator's Book* (176 pgs), Gloranthan Visions (112 pgs), Starting Rules Synopsis Booklet (56 pgs), b&w map; $44.95

Last week my wife and I received a visit from someone whom we hadn't seen in a while . . . her multiple sclerosis came back with a vengeance. She's on steroids right now, and the only danger we have to worry about is whether or not she wishes to join the East German olympic team. Last week I received a visitor from someone who I haven't seen in a while: *Glorantha*, *the Hero Wars*.

Sometimes we see a familiar face, and it turns out to be a nightmare. When I saw *Runequest*, as produced by Avalon Hill, the last time it was a nightmare. A somewhat complicated game had become even more complicated, and the meat of what I wanted to read -- Glorantha -- only seemed to come out in fits and starts. To its credit Avalon Hill seemed to be getting more material out about Glorantha, but then they cancelled the game.

I didn't have many expectations for *Hero Wars*. Well, I hated the cover (Orlanth in stretch pants!?!), and I felt that the system was going to be a mess. *Runequest* had always had a certain amount of complexity, and I felt that if this complexity were lost then part of the essential flavor of the world of Glorantha might be lost as well. I was wrong!

Robin Laws, by whatever muse which inspired him, has created a system that expands the story telling opportunities within this extraordinarily rich world of Glorantha. The organization of said rules leaves much to be desired (indices are godsends), but the overall intent and effect is mythical.

The whole system revolves around opposed d20 rolls. Whenever a player wishes to perform a task, both she and the judge will roll dice. The roll will produce critical failure, failure, success, or critical success. These results are then cross referenced to determine the final effects. Needless to say, if you roll a critical success, and the judge rolls a critical failure, someone's going to be singing a song of glory!

This is the basic system, but there are all sorts of neat little fiddly bits that add to this basic system.

One concept is mastery. Now most skills are the things we're all generally good at -- stuff in the teens on a d20. If you're better than average, then rather than having a skill of (say) 23 you get a mastery, which is written as 3M (I don't have the cool rune font for this). Lets say you're even better than that . . . oh, around 53, then its written as 13M2. Well that's the nomenclature, but what does it mean? It means that you can kick some butt. One level of mastery bumps up any roll by one level. A failure becomes a success, and a success becomes a critical success! This means you can put a major hurting on any of those low level critters, but in going against people more powerful than yourself . . . well, that's where the player's brains come in. The rolling is easy, because you only have to remember the number to the left of the mastery rune, while number on the right tells how many bumps up you would get. Masteries will cancel one another out, which evens things up in fights between experienced warriors.

Another wonderful concept is the gambling of action points. These are equivalent to your level in the skill used (5M3

is 65 action points), plus or minus any modifiers. The results of the die rolling then determine how many action points are gained, lost, or given to the opponent. The contest is over when one opponent reaches zero. If you win an exchange you can refuse to take some action points, and instead give your opponent a -1 penalty. This can represent wounding or some other disability. Depending on how the contest turns out these effects can go away, or require some time to heal. There are options for weapons and armor, followers, etc., and all of these things are handled quickly and elegantly . . . though with the disorganization in the rules elegant might take a while. This is a quick and easy system allows players to have characters of some power, while being able to challenge them at the same time. Woof! This is good stuff.

Another wonderful point about this system is the simple variety between the various magic and belief systems in the game. This game handles monotheism, sorcery, God-granted powers, shamanism, Eastern mysticism/kung fu powers, etc. For example, you might be a follower of Issaries, which would give you a chance to develop an affinity like your God's. Issaries is good at communication so you could develop a similar affinity. This would allow you to do a number of things, at a penalty, involving communication . . . but you can develop these affinities into feats such as convince buyer, or talk with hands. (I might be wrong about this, but it is my present understanding.) This allows you to focus the affinity into a specific action at much less of a penalty. If you're a sorceror you can learn grimoires, which give you a wide variety of abilities/spells. For instance, the grimoire *The Book of Betrayal and Murder* has a blessing found in it named Call Teen to Church (I'd like this myself). These are really cool, because there are a lot of different abilites, but they aren't really fleshed out. Now in some ways I would have liked to have these various magical abilities to be better spelled out, but by giving a simple description it leaves an awful lot up to the imagination of the GM and her players.

The books are fairly expensive. The boxed set, which includes the basic rules book, a narrator's guide, a book of short stories, and around 40 pages of additional material, cost $44.95. The ***Glorantha: Introduction to the Hero Wars*** book ran another $19.95. The books are large in page numbers, but small in size. The small size is nice though, because the covers, which I had hated, really look very nice. Its also nice to have these small books because they are much easier to carry around, and I felt a lot less geeky reading them in my wife's doctor's office. They don't scream "Roleplayer!" but quite reasonably state "fantasy book reader."

Overall, this is the finest introduction to Glorantha that I have ever read. The game system now matches the world mythology, and that's a gift. Greg Stafford writes a lot about the power of stories well told (so did Joseph Campbell, as a matter of fact), and on a bad week in my life, these stories helped. Kudos; not many games can serve as inspiration (not distraction) in a time of crisis.

-- Scott Shafer

Pyramid Review

Ghost Dog: The Way of the Samurai RPG

Published by [Guardians of Order](#)

Written by David L. Pulver and John R. Phythyon, Jr.

160 b&w pages; $19.95

Ghost Dog is an attempt by Guardians of Order to fill a special niche in the role playing industry. It's a game that focuses on one player and his game master. Using the easy to understand Tri-Stat System, *Ghost Dog* is simple to start and enjoy.

Part resource book, part role playing product, *Ghost Dog* walks a fine line between usefulness as an RPG, and a movie ad. For those who don't know what *Ghost Dog* is, it's the story of a young "gansta'"-type individual who lives his life through the code of the samurai, working as an assassin for a failing mafia family. A mix up happens that puts Ghost Dog at ends against his former employees, and wham! Conflict is started.

While the Tri-Stat system is a proven system, it's starting to suffer "Palladiumidis." By this I mean that I already have the Tri-Stat 1st and 2nd edition. Do I really need a customized version for this book? Just as Palladium incorporates their core rules into every new game line, it seems Guardians of Order does the same thing. Sure, there are example weapons and stats for the numerous characters of the movie, but since most of these characters are killed or aren't combative in nature, the point is rather moot. One of the confusing things is that while there is some level of customization to account for a real world setting, no super powers or talents,it fails to go far enough. Unlike *GURPS* or *Hero* where there are various point levels set for each genre or specific campaign, *Ghost Dog* leaves it up to the GM to decide what power level his campaign will be. Strangely enough, this only effects the amount of character points (15-25, 30, 35, 40-45, 50-55), but doesn't change the amount of skill points, which is always 20. Just for the record, Ghost Dog is a 35 point character, so perhaps that is the default level. It can be argued that those who play higher powered characters can always spend those character points to gain more skill points, but that's player motivated, not system motivated. A second problem I have with the Tri-Stat system is that there is no limit or standard on the number of disadvantages that a player can take.

The book's focus on the movie is terrific. If you haven't seen the movie and intend to, don't read this book. It is very detailed and has more information that is apparent from one viewing of the movie. You'll spoil many of the movie's finer points by reading the book.

The focus on campaigning in the *Ghost Dog* world is where the book takes a turn for the worse. While mafia-style campaigns are interesting, the book's focus is mainly on using them as the bad guys. While this is based on the movie, it can make for a short term campaign. Again, this is not a problem if that's the goal of the player and GM, but for those who want more information on other organizations like the Triad or the Yakuza, there is little to be found in this book.

A smaller problem is: what type of character is the player going to be? While using Ghost Dog is one option, the other options seem limiting. I was hoping that David Pulver would take the one hint of other street samurai in the game and run with it. While it is an option, there isn't a lot of detail to back up the origin. Player types are basically Ghost Dog, mafia member, connected to the mafia, and other characters based in the street level mode. One of the things that makes *Ghost Dog* such an interesting movie is the numerous conflicts between cultures. Without playing the main character of the movie, you could be playing Dirty Harry, or another gun toting character who's always in trouble with

the wrong people. It's not the same effect. Quotes, both from the book Hagakure and from various characters in the movie, break up the two column layout of the book. The quotes from Hagakure all seem to be drawn from the movie, which is disappointing since if you've seen the movie, you already know those parts of the book. Strangely enough, while there is a lot of detail on this book of the samurai, it doesn't make the recommended reading list.

There are statistics for almost every member of the *Ghost Dog* movie, from the urban samurai himself to the young girl Pearline. In some cases I have to wonder: why do we need stats for some of these characters? Some of these characters have minimal screen time. Take Handsome Frank, killed shortly after the movie opens. Do we realy need stats for him? Perhaps; the background information is sometimes substantial and gives the GM more tools to work with if he chooses to set his campaign in an earlier/alternative world of *Ghost Dog*.

One of the most interesting aspects of **Ghost Dog**, one-on-one playing, is covered too quickly to really showcase the differences between one on one and group play. It's noted that one-on-one play often goes quicker because the action is more focused, but doesn't go into a lot of depth as to insure player and GM are on the same level. The advice is often drawn from other sources like the **[BESM 2nd Edition Book](#)**. It's good advice, but how many times do you need to read it? I would've preferred a whole slew of new advice with a direct focus on how roleplaying with one player is different, how to make it work, what the most common problems are, and how to overcome them.

The book is filled with numerous pictures straight from the movie. In some ways, this is regrettable. The single drawn illustration on page 160, promoting the comic by Scott Morse from Oni Press, has an interesting interpretation of Ghost Dog. Some detail is lost in the photographs, but anyone who has seen the movie will be able to place the scenes easily. More important are the recommended lists. The book list includes numerous mafia books, but not a single RPG book. (I would add to that list anything by Steven Long for the **Dark Champions** setting for the **Hero** system.) The movie list, while including such classics as the *Godfather Trilogy* and other mafia movies, goes a little further with some anime like *Ninja Scroll* sneaking in. Those who complain that game companies never include indexes will be pleased with the two-page one included here. Lastly, there is a character sheet at the back of the book for ease of copying. This game's central theme, that of a solo killer, also works with movies like *The Professional*, and *The Replacement Killers*. Most of the numerous movies listed in the recommended viewing section can be taken almost whole cloth into the **Ghost Dog** setting.

If you enjoyed the *Ghost Dog* movie and want a reference work, or want to recreate some street level themes using the Tri Stat system and don't own (or don't mind owning again) the Tri Stat system, then **Ghost Dog** is for you. If you own **BESM 2nd edition** and the *Ghost Dog* movie, perhaps you'd be better off taking inspiration from the movie, and applying it to your own campaign.

-- Joe G. Kushner

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(*Reviewer's Note:* The *Ghost Dog* DVD boasts a 5.1 Dolby Digitial soundtrack, deleted scenes, music vidio, isolated music score, is 16:9 Widescreen, and has a bonus 30 minute feature, "The Odyssey: The Journey into the life of a Samurai", which could have been renamed, "The Making of Ghost Dog." Definitely a master resource for an assassin style campaign.)

Pyramid Pick

The Big Idea Card Game

Card Game for for 3 to 6 players

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest

54 Cards; $3.00

So what's the *Big Idea*? It's a card game that takes about an hour where venture capitalists vie to make the most money by investing in companies and taking them public. Sounds dry? Not with products such as "Mentholated Cat -- It's like a cat . . . but it's also invigorating!" and "Unholy Toy -- It's like a fun child's toy . . . but it's also a crime against nature!"

Players start with $10 of their own money, five chips that represent venture capital that they control, and a hand of cleverly designed cards. As with all Cheapass games you must supply some pieces (in this case, the money and chips as well as a six-sided die). The cards are of higher quality than the early Cheapass games such as *Give Me the Brain* and *Kill Dr. Lucky*, with gloss finish fronts on bright white paper.

In the Seed (or Product) phase of each turn, players can form a product from the cards in their hands by combing an Item card and a Description card, then laying them face down. When the cards are revealed side by side, the name of the product (e.g. "Happy Shack") should be oriented so the other players can read it. Players then read the description that is formed on the other side of the cards (e.g. "It's like a house in the woods . . . that makes your troubles melt away!") and must place a chip on their new product. They can then expound upon the virtues of their product to attract further investment in the next phase since there is no game mechanic reason to choose one new product over another. A shy person might have trouble with this part, but the card combinations can be positively inspirational.

In the Venture (or Secret) phase, players secretly decide which new product, other than their own, they will invest in and simultaneously place their chips on that product. We placed a chip in our hand (or not, to skip this phase) and counted to three before placing it on the new product of our choice. This is when you find out how good your product pitch was.

In the Mezzanine (or Open) phase, players invest by placing a chip on one old or new product in turn, but have to pay $1 to each other player with a chip already there. They can also decide to remove a chip from a product in this phase instead. Salesmanship abounds in this phase ("Swiss Sushi will be bigger than Swiss Cheese!").

In the Offering (or IPO) phase, players find out if their companies go public and if so, how successful they were. For each product, a die is rolled and, if the result is less than or equal to the number of shares on the product, it pays off at twice the roll per share. Cheers ("Evil.com pays off big!") and wails ("Gigantic Beer seemed a sure winner . . .") are heard. Products that don't go public and still have investment chips on them stay for the next round.

The card combinations make the game. Some evoke laughter (e.g. "Frozen Pants"), some songs (e.g. "Mexi-Radio"), and some just odd looks (e.g. "Perforated Game"). A warning -- the game can take a turn to PG-13 with a string of products like "Love Pants," "Moistened Chair," and "Erotic Tool," so playing in a mixed age group may be uncomfortable.

The game scales well for different numbers of players since the ratio of investors to products stays the same, but with

only three players the choices can be limiting. With more players there can be more "orphan" products (ones that don't go public) as the hot products attract the investments and go public quickly.

We had a great time and I think it is one of the better Cheapass games, but it is not one that lends itself to replaying immediately. The 54-card deck gets reshuffled once or twice during the ten or twelve rounds you play, and the cards are slightly less entertaining the second time around. I'd love to see a sequel that can be played by itself or combined with the original to provide more variety.

The combination of luck, skill, and humor along with the $3.00 price tag makes this an easy game to recommend as a filler between more serious games or for a get together with your non-gamer friends. What other game lets you rejoice over the successful launch of the Cyber Chicken(TM)?

-- Rich Shipley

Montejon Mutters

Eisen (for 7th Sea RPG)

Published by [Alderac Entertainment Group](#)

Written by Kevin Wilson

128 pages; $19.95

* * *

This is a new feature of Pyramid -- a regular review column. There are a few points
we should over before we actually start.

First, the rating system. I use a scale of 1 to 5. These ratings are based on the perceived value of the work. If I think a
book or game is a waste of time and money, it will get a low rating. If I think a book or game was worth much more
than its price, it gets a high rating. A summary of the ratings is given below.

1 -- Stop the Presses! Please!
2 -- Buyer's Regret
3 -- Worth the Price of Admission
4 -- A Fine Addition to the Library
5 -- Buy Buy Buy!

I will endeavor to give you much more than just the rating to work with.

Secondly, if you have a product you want to see reviewed, send your e-mail request to montejon@mad.scientist.com.
This is the same if you are the publisher of the work, or just someone wanting a second opinion. To ensure your e-mail
doesn't die a horrible death, being thrown against the tender mercies of my SPAM filter, put a tag in the subject line,
like this: [REVIEW].

If you want to comment on a review, you are best off using the [Pyramid Discussion groups](#)

Montejon Mutters will be published on the 2nd and 4th weeks of each month. The first four issues are a trial run. If
you love (or hate) this feature, now is the time to speak up.

* * *

*"The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is really not a small thing -- it is the difference
between the lightning bug and the lightning."*
--Samuel Clemens, Letter to George Bainton [Oct 15, 1888]

7th Sea is the game that almost got it right. It has sword fights, deep passion, religious conflict, more religious conflict,
cannons, pirates, lost treasures, balconies, chandeliers, secret societies, and ancient magic. There are no airships, but
that does the setting no lasting injury. Where *7th Sea* falls apart is in the politics. There are a handful of heavily
stereotyped nations, plus a romanticized edition of the Caribbean buccaneers, duking it out in a bizarre conflation of
famous European conflicts. There are elements of the Christian conversion of Scandinavia, the 30-Years War, the
French Revolution, and the Wars of Napoleon all thrown in a heap.

When framing characters for *7th Sea* I feel as if I were producing the opera Aida with full period costumes against sets

drawn by Charles M. Schulz. The characters are vivid and attractive, but the background they move against is blotchy and abstracted.

To counteract this we have a string of "splatbooks" -- books that focus on one particular setting feature. I am not fond of splatbooks. They are often poorly written, often promote character inflation, and often contradict one another. To make matters worse for the poor game master, they are also the vehicle by which most games advance the so-called "metaplot" -- the underlying narrative of the game setting. While I stand by the theory a metaplot can be a good thing, I have yet to encounter one that added more to the game than it took away.

Against all these prejudices comes the latest national sourcebook from Alderac Entertainment -- *Eisen*. Despite all my expectations, I like it. But, before we get into why I like it, let us talk about what I do not like.

1. **Fiction.** It is standard practice in an Alderac splatbook to start every chapter with a bit of fiction. I dislike game fiction as a matter of principle. However, some of Alderac's fiction, mostly in the ***Legend of the Five Rings*** game line, has been quite good. The fiction in *Eisen* was not so good. It was flat, bland, and boring. It gave me no useful information. It did not expand my understanding of the characters involved. Yeah and verily, it was bad.
2. **Introduction.** One of the weaknesses of *7th Sea* is how often the flow of game information is derailed to promote the authors' moral stance. These petty attempts at moral instruction are often found in the introductions, and *Eisen* is no exception. If I wanted polemic I would go reread Voltaire.
3. **Rules Conflict.** Natives of the province of Sieger must take a Hubris. Someone with the Man of Will advantage may not take a Hubris. Suppose I want to play someone from Sieger with the Man of Will advantage? (In fact, I want to do exactly that.)
4. **Cardinal Sin.** The writer of *Eisen*, Kevin Wilson, committed one of Montejon's Cardinal Sins of English. He wrote "baited breath" instead of "bated breath." This particular error always makes me think bad things about the writer's literary skills.
5. **Presentation.** The Game Master information starts in the middle of a page of player information, and it kicks straight into a list of secrets. I had read the secret of the Imperator Reifenstahl's suicide before I noticed I was reading GM-only information. Granted, I was skimming, rather than reading carefully. When I was reading carefully I noticed the preceding cautionary paragraph, but I doubt I am the only person who will make this mistake.

Now, for why I like it.

1. **Subject matter.** It is about Eisen, which is my favorite nation in the *7th Sea* canon. Eisen encompasses two themes in gaming which I enjoy. It is a land of religious conflict, and it is a land with strong political rivalries. If you ask me, Eisen is the only part of the *7th Sea* setting that does the characters justice.
2. **New toys.** Like every splatbook, *Eisen* includes new mechanics for the game. This is one of the major downsides of splatbooks. However, if you are going to add new toys and thus new GM headaches, they should be good toys. These are. I especially like the new "Man of Will" advantage, the new "Urchin" skill, the "Crisis of Faith" background, the advanced mass combat rules, and the "Drexel" swordsman school.
3. **Politics.** I love politics. A game without politics is not worth playing. As I have said, the cartoonish nature of the setting's politics is *7th Sea*'s greatest flaw. *Eisen* ameliorates this in many ways. Previous nation books for *7th Sea* made the game's nations into bland copies of real nations. Avalon, for example, was a cheap knock-off of the real British Isles. The Eisen book does not fall into this trap. While there are definite echoes of the German Reformation and the 30-Years War, the nation of Eisen manages to stand out as something besides a half-hearted clone of Germany. The provinces have individual character, and strongly individualized viewpoints. Differing viewpoints lead to conflict, conflict leads to politics, politics makes this reviewer happy.
4. **The Nibelungen.** Okay, the name is lame. Still, this secret society of smiths beats out several of *7th Sea*'s more prominent secret societies by a coolness factor of 10.
5. **Religion.** I like themes of religious conflict, and Eisen is all about religious conflict. The section actually about religion is poorly written. The transcripts of the conflict between Mathias Lieber (*7th Sea*'s Martin Luther) and the Church officials fall far short of their intended drama. These are trivial things when stood up next to the fact that religion actually matters in Eisen.

In summary, this book has some very strong flaws but it is still worth its sticker price for those who play *7th Sea*. As a work of art it fails utterly. As a game setting it succeeds admirably. I would go so far as to say that all you need to get the most out of *7th Sea* is the *Eisen* sourcebook, the *Player's Guide*, and the *GM's Guide*. Everything else is trivia.

If you are not a *7th Sea* player, you will get very little from this book. I cannot recommend this book for setting ideas, as there are more cost-effective sources of inspiration.

On the Montejon Scale, the *Eisen* sourcebook gets a 3: Worth the Price of Admission, but only if you already have an interest in *7th Sea*.

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Kibbles & Bits

Okay; this week I'm going to take it a bit easy and go over some fiddly bits.

* * *

By now most of you should have received an e-mail invitation/confirmation to join the Pyramid subscription list. That's because we've moved our mailing list to [eGroups](#). Hopefully this will give our tireless web wizards fewer headaches and more time to beat their *Welltris* high scores.

If you *haven't* received an e-mail confirmation, you can subscribe by sending an e-mail to [sjgames-pyramid-subscribe@egroups.com](#).

* * *

After far too long without much time to devote to it, I've finally managed to reduce the non-review slushpile from 108 to zero. (For those who don't know, the slushpile is the horde of submitted articles folks send to *Pyramid*.) This took me 52 hours over the course of four days, so I'm still a wee bit out of it currently. But if you *haven't* received a response regarding your non-review submission (not counting snail mail submissions), and you submitted it before October 1st, please [drop me a note](#).

I'm going to try too update the Writer's Guidelines (which haven't been revised since I came on board) some time this weekend, so if you're an aspiring Pyramid writer, you may want to wait for that to go up. Regardless, I'd *strongly* recommend reading over any potential submissions one more time and making sure they're in tip-top shape. And most definitely, I'd *STRONGLY* recommend rereading that first sentence. Of the 108 submissions, eight had a problem in the very first sentence. It *is* possible to recover after that, but as far as first impressions go, it definitely gets my reading of your article off on the wrong foot. (Admit it, how many of you read the first sentence of this paragraph and thought I was a moron for saying, "try too update?")

* * *

This week sees the introduction of a new review columnist: Montejon Smith. His biweekly column, Montejon's Mutters, is one of the experiments to come out of the **sjgames.pyramid.newcolumn** board. You may want to vote on this review (see below on voting), since I'll be looking closely at the ratings for the first few columns to see if this is something you all as readers want.

Likewise I'd invite you all to join us over in the [Discussion Groups](#) (in particular **sjgames.pyramid**) if you have any opinions about this new column you'd like to share in a public forum.

* * *

Speaking of new columns and public forums, the group **sjgames.pyramid.newcolumn** should be going away at the end of this week. I thank everyone who's participated over there; I have a *lot* of good ideas to sift through, and I'm guessing that by November I should (hopefully) have some final decisions. In the meantime, you still have a few days left to make your voice heard on the subject.

* * *

Speaking of voting on reviews, I've been asked, in private and on the message boards, how people should vote on reviews. Should they be voting based on their thoughts on the quality of the review, or their thoughts on the product being reviewed?

Now, you can vote however you like (though you'd need a specially numbered 10-sider for easy gamerly random

generation), but I personally believe that you should vote based on the quality of the review. Did the review help you make an informed decision? Was it interesting? Was it balanced? Voting on the quality of the product doesn't strike me as very fair, since they don't cancel Roger Ebert's TV show just because he was stuck reviewing a stinker like *Zardoz*.

* * *

Thanks to the [chat guide](#) that appeared last week, I saw a lot of new faces in the chat room. Which rakes the cockles of my heart over hot coals. Or something like that. But seriously, it's nice to know that more of you are taking advantage of another aspect of your *Pyramid* subscriptions. Next time we have a chat, why not come and see us?

* * *

And (almost) finally, something else has been brought to my attention as I've sifted through submissions and my e-mail inbox.

Pet peeves: we all have them. I like to think I don't have many, but I *do* have one of note.

Steven: that's my name. It's been my name almost all my life (ever since the day I was born and my dad realized he didn't like the name that *had* been chosen for me, so my tuckered mom needed to come up with something else on the spot). It's what I like to be called.

In particular, my name isn't Stephen, or <shudder> Steve. (As an aside, Steve Marsh was the name of one of the editors on the original ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game. Steve Marsh was also the name of a country singer on the *Alice* TV show.) In a pinch I don't mind (much) being called Stephen; I attribute that more to national/regional differences (not unlike spelling "color" with a *u*). And in person it sounds the same anyway.

But I *really* don't like being called Steve. In my mind it's like a fork on a chalkboard. It's a wet toilet seat in the middle of the night. It's the insane chittering of a thousand howler monkeys yapping on cell phones in the middle a movie.

I know it may be irrational, but I would take it as a personal favor if you all would please call me Steven.

Thank you.

* * *

I just realized that it's the Friday the 13th. In October. In the year 2000. With a full moon.

Um . . . if it's the same to everyone else, I'm going to stay off the streets today.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **The AADA Road Atlas and Survival Guide Volume Three: The South**.

(Three stars) "If it looks like a brithan, smells like a brithan and acts like a brithan -- it may be something entirely different.
   --Cnut One-Arm, legendary adventuring troubadour"

Unriddling the Sphinx

"What has one voice, and is four-footed, two-footed, and three-footed?"
-- riddle of the Sphinx of Thebes, according to Apollodorus

What has one name, three forms, and a hundred explanations? What begins as a man, rules as an angel, and dies as a woman? What is a dungeon at sunrise, a wandering monster at midday, and a puzzle at sunset? What else can it be but the sphinx? I'll unriddle the first one to set our groundwork: although the "traditional" sphinx has the body of a lion with the head and chest of a human, it sometimes possesses, rather than the standard-model human head (forming the androsphinx), the head of a ram (the criosphinx) or a hawk (the hieracosphinx). (Sphinxes also come in male and female, in singles or pairs, and with or without wings.) One name, three forms. The hundred explanations are on their way.

"[F]ierce Echidna who is half a nymph with glancing eyes and fair cheeks, and half again a huge snake, great and awful, with speckled skin, eating raw flesh beneath the secret parts of the holy earth. And there she has a cave deep down under a hollow rock far from the deathless gods and mortal men. There, then, did the gods appoint her a glorious house to dwell in: and she keeps guard in Arima beneath the earth, grim Echidna, a nymph who dies not nor grows old all her days. . . . Echidna was subject in love to Orthus and brought forth the deadly Sphinx which destroyed the Cadmeans, and the Nemean lion, which Hera, the good wife of Zeus, brought up and made to haunt the hills of Nemea, a plague to men."
-- Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 302-329

By tradition, the sphinx begins in Egypt, with the Sphinx of Giza, carved from a natural outcropping of sandstone near the Pyramids some time in the neighborhood of 2550 B.C. to depict the Pharaoh Khafre, builder of the second pyramid. Virtually every aspect of that statement is, as befits the Sphinx, uncertain. There are, for example, no Old Kingdom records of the Sphinx existing at all, and even Herodotus fails to mention it in his careful 5th century B.C. description of the Pyramid complex. In the other direction, geologist Robert Schoch has studied the pattern of water erosion on the body of the Sphinx and maintains that it must have been carved during a period of frequent rain, placing its origin between 5000 and 7000 B.C. Its face is even more heavily eroded, and has undergone at least three restorations -- the first we know of performed by the Pharaoh Thutmose IV around 1400 B.C. in response to a dream that promised him power if he restored the Sphinx -- and one deliberate desecration, by a 15th century Moslem fanatic. And finally, the Sphinx' primacy in art has been undermined by excavations in Anatolia and Mesopotamia which have uncovered sphinx-decorated seals and ivories, also dating to roughly 2600 B.C.

The third millennium B.C., it turns out, is a good one for sphinxes. They also appear in the *Enuma elish,* the Akkadian creation epic in which the goddess Tiamat gives birth to eleven great monsters to avenge the killing of her husband Apsu. One of them, the *lahmu,* is often translated as a "sphinx" since the later *lamassu* describes human-headed winged lions (or bulls). Sphinx art is definitely coeval with the *Enuma elish* throughout Mesopotamia, and it is interesting that much of it shows sphinxes in groups or in natural settings, almost as if the sphinx is being depicted as a race rather than as an individual monster to overcome. If so, that would make the sphinx the second race on earth, after gods and before men. The Greek sphinxes follow the same literary path, first mentioned in Hesiod (in ca. 750 B.C.) springing from Echidna (like Tiamat a chthonic serpent goddess) along with many other legendary creatures. Greek art also shows a flowering of sphinxes right around the time of Hesiod, although the sphinx had reached Greece via Crete and Anatolia as early as 1800 B.C. Hesiod describes Echidna as "in no wise like either to mortal men or to the undying gods," more evidence for a "third race" concept behind all this. Sphinxes in Greek art, however, are more exclusively monstrous, rather than serving as emblems of royal or divine power as they did in Egypt, Anatolia, and Akkad.

"Science, being the wonder of the ignorant and unskilful, may be not absurdly called a monster. In figure and aspect it is represented as many-shaped, in allusion to the immense variety of matter with which it deals. . . . . [T]he axioms and arguments of science penetrate and hold fast the mind, so that it has no means of evasion or escape . . . and unless they be solved and disposed of, they strangely torment and worry the mind, pulling it first this way and then that, and fairly tearing it to pieces."

-- Sir Francis Bacon, "Sphinx; or, Science"

So if they're not gods and they're not beasts or men, what are sphinxes? The names don't give us much help, although like the statues, they promise more than they can deliver. The Greeks derived "sphinx" from *sphingein,* "binder, constrictor, throttler," which neatly ties in with the serpentine Echidna/Tiamat until you realize that the original Greek form was an entirely different word, *phix,* which doesn't seem to mean anything very clearly at all. The Egyptians may have used the term *shesepankh* ("living image") for sphinx, but that seems suspiciously like another back-formation to explain the anomalous giant of Giza. Appropriately enough, *lahmu* seems to mean "muddy" or "obscure," which is an apt description of the situation.

How the sphinx becomes attached to the riddle of Oedipus at the city of Thebes is yet another unsolved question. Although it's tempting to dismiss the riddle of the sphinx as a metaphor for self-knowledge (as Jung does, at great length), there seems to be more there. It's always possible that the "local hero," Oedipus, and the local mountain, Mt. Phikion, got tangled up with the "phix" of Hesiod (who was also from Thebes). The riddle could be a reflection of the solar cult of the Sphinx in Egypt, where it represented the sun at sunrise (Kheperi), noon (Re), and evening (Atum). Egypt also has a myth of a female monster who rested on a high place above the royal city of Waset (named "Thebes" by Greek travelers, intriguingly enough). This was Hathor-Sekhmet, the mother-goddess (like the Greek Hera, who sent the sphinx to Thebes) who became a devouring lioness (thus establishing our lion-woman sphinx connection) to stop a human rebellion against Re. (The king of Thebes, Laius, had likewise rebelled against morality by raping his guest, the son of Pelops, favorite of the gods.) In order to prevent her eating everyone in Egypt, she (like the sphinx of Oedipus) was defeated with guile, in this case by disguising beer as blood to fool Hathor-Sekhmet into drinking herself into a stupor. In a final coincidence, the name Hathor may mean "House of the Face," a very apt description of the Sphinx temple at Giza.

"He also dedicated for the most secret place, whose breadth was twenty cubits, and length the same, two cherubims of solid gold; the height of each of them was five cubits; they had each of them two wings stretched out as far as five cubits; wherefore Solomon set them up not far from each other, that with one wing they might touch the southern wall of the secret place, and with another the northern: their other wings, which joined to each other, were a covering to the ark, which was set between them; but nobody can tell, or even conjecture, what was the shape of these cherubims."
-- Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book VIII, 3:3

Sphinxes thus emblematize divine rule, and it's in that form that they entered Hebrew religious art as the cherubim. Whether the Hebrews brought their sphinxes out of Egypt (as the Bible would indicate) or obtained them from the Babylonians (whose word *kerub*, meaning "intermediary," they applied to the image of the lamassu/sphinx) they used them in the same fashion, to mark off the divine precincts from mortal gaze. Those who violated the law, the cherubim killed (although the credit always went to Yahweh). Again, note that the cherub/sphinx guards a mystery, the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy of Holies. There's a particularly unsavory Midrashic legend that, when the Greeks (those sphinx-bashers) broke into the Holy of Holies in 168 B.C., they found the cherubim copulating and caged them to parade around Jerusalem in shame. The connection between the sphinx and monstrous (Echidna-like) fertility hinted at by this tale evokes the rebellious Nephilim, the "sons of God" who mated with men and produced monsters.

"The Second Coming! Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man
Its gaze as blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs . . . ."
-- William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"

Recast, then. Born in an unnatural intermediate state between man and god, the sphinx is simultaneously the omnipresent symbol of divine power (especially murderous, unpredictable, and monstrous power) and the unknowable. The sphinx is, in fact, the enemy of memory and clear thought; Sophocles has the Thebans lament that the sphinx compelled them to "forget the past and attend to only immediate needs." Hence, the riddle: the sphinx *is* the riddle, the third element in a world of gods and men, the term that defines itself uselessly, the ineffable face of the Other.

Oedipus, of course, answers the riddle of the sphinx with "mankind," who begins on all fours, walks on two legs as an adult, and hobbles on a cane in senescence; forcing the riddle to reverse. The answer is no longer "sphinx" but "man," the wave form collapses in the other direction, the sphinx must destroy herself in sheer contradiction. Meanwhile, Oedipus' own life recapitulated the greater riddle; his own identity was a mystery to him, he murdered Laius (thus serving as the sphinx' agent of revenge for Laius' crime), and then blinded himself in madness when he learned the truth. To bring rationality to Greece, Oedipus was fated to go mad. The sphinx, therefore, is the "living image," the perceptible facet, of the Things Man Was Not Meant To Know.

"The Great Sphinx! God! -- that idle question I asked myself on the sun-blest morning before . . . what huge and loathsome abnormality was the Sphinx originally carven to represent?"
-- H.P. Lovecraft (as Harry Houdini), "Imprisoned With The Pharaohs"

Which suits them admirably as entities from outside geometry, creatures for a **Call of Cthulhu** campaign of ancient menaces that once ruled the Earth but were expelled or imprisoned by a change in natural law. They still wait, lingering around their old temples and statues, like the vampiric nefilim in Tim Powers' *The Stress of Her Regard*. The lloigor from Colin Wilson's *Return of the Lloigor* fit the sphinx motif almost perfectly, and Cthulhu himself is a monstrous composite representing both divine power and impenetrable insanity, complete with a cavern palace, like Echidna, where he "dies not nor grows old all [his] days." Play it as a game of rebellion against the Outer Ones in **GURPS Egypt** or **GURPS Greece**, or as a **GURPS Places of Mystery** game in which the Sphinx and the Pyramids are the keys to a dimensional prison-vortex of the sphinxes. In a proper **GURPS Cliffhangers** archaeological thriller, the Arabs will have a perfectly good reason for calling the Sphinx "Abu al-Hawl," the "Father of Terror." Perhaps the Sphinx really was carved in primordial times, vanished until Thutmose IV "restored" it after his Cthulhoid, Faustian dream. The sphinxes speak in one voice from many forms, and in the morning, noon, and sunset of mankind's history. What time is it now? Who's asking? And do you really want to know?

Sheaullaugh O'Donough

for *Mage: the Sorcerers Crusade*

by Phil Masters

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Keith Johnson

Nature: Theorist
Demeanor: Guardian
Essence: Castellum

Attributes: Strength/2, Dexterity/4 (smooth), Stamina/2, Charisma/3, Manipulation/4 (devious), Appearance/3, Perception/2, Intelligence/3, Wits/3

Talents: Alertness/1, Dodge/2, Expression/2, Intrigue/1, Logic/3, Subterfuge/1.
Skills: Etiquette/2, Firearms/2, Research/3, Riding/1, Torture/2.
Knowledges: Academics/2, Culture/1, Investigation/3, Linguistics/2, Medicine/3, Science/2 (anatomy)

Spheres: Entropy/2, Life/3, Mind/3

Backgrounds: Daemon/2, Destiny/1, Influence/1, Resources/2, Spies/2

Arete: 3
Willpower: 6

Appearance and Manner: Sheaullaugh O'Donough (the name is pronounced "Sheelah O-Donnah") is a pale-skinned, red-haired woman who has lost almost all of her original Irish accent; today, she mostly speaks English, and can easily pass as a member of the upper classes. She is reasonably attractive, but makes little effort to exploit the fact, usually wearing dark, plain, but high-quality clothes; un-Enlightened folk often assume that she is the widow of some aristocrat or knight. Her manner is invariably serious and often rather cold, though courteous, usually dominating others in a subtle but effective way.

Away from safe courts and great houses, O'Donough usually travels in the company of an appropriate group of escorts. These may be Daedalean Brethren, or simply mundane hired guards (paid from funds allocated by the Order); in the latter case, she is always able to ensure that they are dependable, and probably a little bit unimaginative (though she knows that it is best that guards be reasonably alert).

Background/Personality: Sheaullaugh O'Donough may be encountered on the road, at some lesser court, or, more likely, in the vicinity of some incident that has caught the attention of the Order of Reason. The un-Enlightened, and non-Daedalean mages, may well take her for a wealthy widow or gentlewoman, perhaps on a pilgrimage. To Daedaleans, she will present herself as a Cosian healer. Indeed, she will quite likely eventually tell them something of her personal history.

The daughter of an Irish barber-surgeon, she acquired a working knowledge of practical medicine in childhood, and

Supporting Cast: Sheaullaugh O'Donough

showed a certain flair therewith -- a flair that brought her to the attention of an Enlightened teacher. Soon, she was traveling among the houses of the Cosians, studying the healing arts and serving as a secret messenger and occasionally as one who can be trusted to resolve problems. In time, she was initiated into the middle ranks of the Order of Reason, and often sent to assist Daedalean groups who have encountered problems. Indeed, she may well appear on the scene shortly after a group of Daedalean PCs have dealt with some kind of dangerous problem. Her healing skills should make her very welcome on such occasions, and her efficiency, contacts with the Order's hierarchy, and reasonable ready wealth should help smooth over minor difficulties in the aftermath of some battle. Even non-Daedaleans may well find her helpful; she is perfectly willing to apply her healing arts to anyone who needs them (though the use of advanced Physic may risk the Scourge if the patient is un-Awakened, making her more cautious in such cases), and she is no sort of direct physical threat even to members of the Nine Traditions; if they recognize her allegiance, she will tell such that her only interest is in healing, and hint that she may well turn a blind eye to their activities if they serve a greater good.

The last is, in fact, the only point where all this typical behavior shades into untruth. O'Donough knows very well that deception is best hidden in a large body of honesty. The story of her life and training given above is completely accurate, but what she will *not* say is that her first teacher was not, himself, a Cosian, but one of the Ksirafai. Having been brought up in a class who were treated as little more than traveling rogues and vagabonds, O'Donough made a promising spy, while her healing skill gave her a useful reason to go where she might be needed. Indeed, her training in Physic was itself combined with observation of the Cosians on behalf of the Ksirafai. Of course, she never had time to venture quite as deep into their Arts as a true member of that Convention, but as a traveler and, in many of the areas to which she is sent, a foreigner, her ignorance of a few deeper Cosian ideas is easy to mask. After all, virtually all of the Daedalean medical scientists have their own diverse theories anyway.

These days, O'Donough is sent to Daedalean groups who have recently had some kind of excitement, primarily to see that there are no undesirable complications ensuing. She will offer real and effective medical aid, and if the group have handled the situation quietly and well, she will be nothing but a help to them, especially if they lack healers of their own; indeed, if they have been especially clever and efficient, her reports may ensure that their talents are noted in the higher levels of the Order. She is, in fact, genuinely compassionate and even kind, when circumstances permit, and may well provide medical aid to anyone who needs it, irrespective of their allegiances. However, she is dedicated and even ruthless in pursuit of her mission, which is to ensure that Daedalean secrets are preserved, and threats to Daedalean ideals are annihilated. She occasionally calls down the full might of the Order, if fire and the sword are truly needed; more often, she applies Mind Arts to ensure that the un-Enlightened forget what they should never have known, or at least that their impression of whatever happened is confused and essentially harmless. She rarely kills, but she is not above such acts. She may use subtle persuasion and Enlightened Rhetoric to achieve such ends, but she may also use drugs and potions, whatever the occasional small risks to the minds or sanity of her "patients."

But beneath all this, O'Donough is a thoughtful individual. She continues in her work, comfortable in herself, because she honestly believes that it is a necessity. She has made serious study of the ideals of the Order and of the Ksirafai, and she is content that what she does is for the best. Indeed, all of her actions are ultimately governed by this rather academic set of ideals and evaluations. Her ideas are subtle and complex, and she mostly keeps them to herself, although they govern her actions -- which sometimes makes her ruthless, despite the fact that her ideals are essentially quite humane.

Abilities: O'Donough is indeed expert in the use of Physic -- exotic and complex medicines, and occasionally surgery and even minor rituals -- to manipulate Life. She can heal others, but she is well aware that the dark side of healing is destruction, and that some medicines influence the Mind as well as the body. Combined with subtle training in Enlightened Rhetoric and courtly manners, this enables her to influence individuals and groups in whatever ways her work requires. She knows how to probe, with blades or words, and sometimes is usefully aware of Entropy, the world's tendency to failure and decay, which she can twist to her own ends. When Enlightened Arts fail her, she usually has a small but well-made wheellock pistol and other weapons concealed somewhere in her heavy traveling cloak or formal dress. She is also trained in various mundane skills, and speaks Gaelic, English, and French (or possibly other languages, as the game setting demands).

Game Uses: Ultimately a typical Ksirafai (if such a thing exists), Sheaullaugh O'Donough represents the hand of the

Order of Reason, and while its touch heals and directs, it can turn in an instant into an iron fist. She will often appear in the aftermath of some dramatic adventure (a demonic incursion, a crashed Skyrigger, the defense of a Cray), offering genuine help -- but also secretly passing judgement. It may take a while for Daedalean characters to guess what they are dealing with here, if they ever do, but her presence means that they have been *noticed* by their superiors, and their errors of judgement will be remembered just as long as their successes. She herself will say little about such lapses, unless they are truly blatant, but she will never assist in concealing or exacerbating them.

To other characters, she is a subtler but more formidable threat. Remember that she is, among other things, a doctor with a Renaissance-era attitude; if the treatments she offers are painful, well, the end often justifies the means. If people learn things that they should not know, they must be induced to forget -- one way or another. She is very careful when she recognizes Disparate or, especially, Traditionalist mages; after all, she is no great fighter, and she will probably be dangerously outnumbered. But that merely makes her inclined and more able to call on any Daedalean warriors in the vicinity.

by Joe Taylor

The Broadside

Be the first in your circuit to own this new dueling sensation. Protected by the thickest armor and armed with 2 compliments of triple shotguns, this beauty will sink all opposition.

The next time you enter the arena, be sure to "cross the T" on your opponents and given 'em the Broadside!

The Broadside -- Luxury, hvy chassis, heavy suspension, large power plant, four heavy-duty tires, driver, gunner, 6 vehicular shotguns; 3 linked left, 3 linked right. Armor: F45, R50, L50, B45, T5, U5. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 92.5, HC 3, 5,760 lbs, $14,900.

The Sniper

Score hits from across the arena with this deadly killer. Its high-resolution targeting system will make you lethal at long range and its extra ammo capacity means you don't have to be stingy with your shots. Sit back and fire away with the Sniper!

The Sniper -- Midsize, hvy chassis, heavy suspension, large power plant, four PR tires, driver, recoilless rifle w/HEAT ammo in turret, one extra HEAT magazine, hi-res single weapon computer. Armor: F44, R44, L44, B44, T33, U5. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 100, HC 3, 5,177 lbs, $13,874.

The Rocket Warrior

With the advanced weapon system of the Rocket Warrior, you will be able to take out even the most heavily-armored opponent with one shot, guaranteed. You can't miss with its five laser-guided heavy rockets and you'll be well-protected behind its tough armor. Each rocket is individually linked so they can be fired in any combination! It makes a deadly partner in team events and a sure winner in solo matches.

Rocket Warrior -- Compact w/carbon-aluminum frame, x-hvy chassis, heavy suspension, medium power plant, four PR tires, driver, 5 laser-guided heavy rockets; 2 front, 1 in right-mounted rocket EWP, 1 in left-mounted rocket EWP, 1 in top-mounted rocket EWP, each linked to front light laser, single weapon computer. Armor: F55, R55, L55, B55,

T5, U10. Four 10 pt. armored wheel hubs. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 90, HC 3, 4,195 lbs, $14,855.

The Incinerator 2050

Fire and explosion: the number one cause of low-division arena deaths. Now they can be at your command with the 2050 model Incinerator. Its unique side-mounted flamethrowers allow a driver-gunner team to BBQ opponents on either side -- a real crowd-pleaser! This year's model features a highly-requested improved fire extinguishing system.

Incinerator 2050 -- Luxury, x-hvy chassis, heavy suspension, super power plant, 4 PR tires, driver, gunner, flamethrower w/HT ammo right, flamethrower w/ HT ammo left, improved fire extinguisher, targeting computer (for gunner). Armor: F40, R50, L50, B40, T5, U10. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 100, HC 3, 6,600 lbs, $15,000.

The Mini-Panzer

Its APFSDS rounds will knock out the opposition while its sloped armor is thick enough to withstand the toughest punishment. It's a good thing the Germans didn't have this baby, but it can be yours today!

Mini-Panzer -- Midsize, x-hvy chassis, heavy suspension, large power plant, four PR tires, driver, anti-tank gun w/APFSDS ammo front, extra APFSDS magazine, single weapon computer. Sloped armor: F60, R50, L50, B50, T9, U10. Four 10 pt. armored wheel hubs. Acceleration 5, Top Speed 92.5, HC 3, 5,757 lbs, $14,280.

To Tear The Scales From Their Eyes

?

by Matthew Rossi

Partial Transcript: Meeting of the Nine, as Recorded by Nathan "Net-Specter" Szilard of the Virtual Adepts, 3/22/98

(Attending the meeting are Chuo-Li Anamaj of the Akashic Brotherhood, Tristan Umbertini of the Celestial Chorus, Curani Apocrypha of the Cult of Ecstacy, Rises Swift as Tears of the Dreamspeakers, Mister Absolute of the Euthanatos, Nialla Du-Chumail of the Order of Hermes, Henri Mazarin of the Sons of Ether, Nharna Govindasama of the Verbena and Nathan "Net-Specter" Szilard of the Virtual Adepts. Also present by invitation is Tizianna Umbrae of the Hollow Ones.)

- **Szilard:** The daimon is active.
- **Umbertini:** Are you certain they can't find us?
- **Mazarin:** Tristan, as I explained to you before, Nathan and I have checked and re-checked the daimon. They can't find us.
- **Absolute:** It hardly matters if they do. We are beaten, Hermean. We . . . are obsolete.
- **Govindasama:** I didn't come all this way to listen to your "return to the primacy of entropy" garbage, Abbie. Nathan and Henri, you two called the meeting, so why not let us in on why?
- **Szilard:** Glad 'ta, G. Apocrypha and I here first twigged to the idea, but it took the Mad Doc to give it form. Doc?
- **Mazarin:** I believe we have discovered a way to win the Ascension War and overthrow the Greyfaces.
- *(Uproar -- several voices muttering or shouting at once. Mazarin waits for calm.)*
- **Mazarin:** As you know, I serve as the Council's mole in the Conventions. It is in that role that I believe we may deal the death-blow to our enemy, in the midst of his power over us.
- **Anamaj:** Explain this!
- **Apocrypha:** Sorry, Chuo-Li. It's a neat plan, really. How do the Greyfaces keep us down?
- **Rises Swift as Tears:** They have poured cement over the well that leads to the Earth. They have frozen the ponds, they have stagnated the rivers, they have poisoned the fields and build mausoleums of metal and flaccid flesh over our world.
- **Apocrypha:** Uhm . . . well, yeah. I was looking for "Paradox" but that's as good as.
- **Du-Chumail:** I have yet to hear an explanation. I warn you, I do not enjoy having my time wasted.

- **Absolute:** Why not let them finish before threatening them? I want to hear them.
- **Szilard:** Wow. Thanks, Abbie. Okay, in a nutshell, here goes: The Conventions hold the knife of Paradox at our throats. Out of six billion or so sleepers, they've made a weight to pins us down and forces us to creep about rather than striding like the colossi we are. So, how do we get out of our chains when we can't count on a Heracles to break us out? Simple. We get the sleepers to do it for us.
- **Mazarin:** It will require sacrifice, but it can be done. We will create such a disturbance that the Greyfaces will be forced to turn to someone to come up with an explanation, and we have already assured that it will be mine to make.
- **Apocrypha:** And then we have 'em. It's like poisoned sugar; they'll be so glad to accept an explanation that they won't even realize that the explanation is the sharp point of the wedge.
- **Mazarin:** It owes a great deal to Quantum Physics . . .
- **Szilard:** And my collection of mint-condition Jack Kirby comics. *(Laughs.)* Paradox will be a whole lot more forgiving of us, if we can pull it off.
- **Umbrae:** So what are we to do? You invited a Hollower, and I came, but I have to be honest and say that I have absolutely *no* idea what you are talking about.
- **Mazarin:** We invited you because this must be more than a few of us. All of us, orphans and Traditions . . . and Marauders.
- *(Deus Carnivore, a Marauder, steps into the room. The buzz of a million wasp's wings follows.)*
- **Carnivore:** Brave new world to make. Especially liked Fourth World books. Kirby was the king.
- **Du-Chumail:** You invited *that*!?
- **Carnivore:** Fear unwarranted. Want what you want.
- **Szilard:** Y'see, there's a Greyface satellite called *Galatea* in orbit. Carnivore's going to hit it for us . . . and in one shot, we will tear the scales from the sleeper's eyes.

March 23, 1998 -- The *Galatea* explodes. All over the world, seemingly normal human beings begin developing powers that seem to defy the laws of nature. The United Nations gives the Aeon Society's Project Utopia the mandate to deal with the "Nova crisis." By December 4th, Dr. Henri Mazarin and his colleague Dr. Farah Rashoud release their discovery of a gland in the brains of those displaying these abilities, and the world comes to accept novas as wondrous yet real people who can do miraculous things.

It was a fraud. The mages of the Traditions used their magick to simulate the eruption of nova powers all over the world, risking enormous Paradox. Of the mages originally behind the effort, six died, chewed up by Paradox Backlash. But the sacrifice was not in vain. All over the world, sleepers became convinced that the impossible had become possible. Mazarin's "node" became real as the realignment of reality happened.

The Technocracy was stunned. In an all-or-nothing roll of the dice, a bedraggled cadre of magi managed to affect a paradigm shift unheard of since their own successful conquest of reality. As the

forces of Paradox realigned, the Traditions staged a series of attacks
on their enemies, who were unsuited to the conflict, having grown
dependent on Paradox to keep their enemies hampered. From 1998
to 2003 the battle raged, across the planes and on Earth.

Null-B and Horizon both fell. Marauders, Nephandi, the Traditions
and the Technocracy tore at each other, desperate to win the war for reality. While they were so occupied, the sleepers
made arrangements of their own.

On September 25th, 2003, the Technocracy got desperate. Under attack from a Marauder cell on the heels of a massive
Nephandi assault they barely repulsed, they used an experimental weapon.

The result was the Sao Paulo blast. Since then, all the factions have been biding their time and observing the new rules
of sleeper reality. There seems to be no doubt that people accept feats that would have slain an aspiring mage; people
fly about, summon lightning, grow to the size of buildings, and even travel via the correspondence point. Yet, although
they don't know it, these "novas" are Awakened. Their nodes allow them power that rivals mages themselves and in
some cases could exceed them.

Following the most recent Tradition/Technocracy war, there are less than two hundred full-fledged mages left of all
stripes . . . and there are more than 8000 novas.

To win the war for reality, the Traditions may have doomed themselves.

The Aeon Society and the Sons of Ether

In many ways, the Sons of Ether are the greatest architects of the nova age. Yet they underestimated the sleepers, and
instead of a world designed to the paradigm experimentation of the Sons, the result of Mazarin's gambit is a place
where the rules are still up in the air. On one side stands the Marauder-Traditions alliance, and on the other the
retrenching Technocracy, fresh from their debilitating war with the Nephandi. Each seeks to manipulate the situation in
order to bring about an ideal future for their own side while once again causing Paradox to come down like a universe-
sized hammer on their enemies.

The Sons of Ether, however, are stymied in much of their attempted manipulations by a group started back in the

1920's, the Aeon Society. Aeon understands the Sons more than anyone else, because both have roots in the wild tumult of the 1920's, of dirigibles and death beams, of daring explorers and evil cults.

Aeon is the child of Maxwell Anderson Mercer. While a sleeper, he was an intelligent, thoughtful man with a great deal more understanding of the reality behind reality than his "friends" among the Sons of Ether and Void Engineers knew. Mercer knew that left to their own devices, the "mages" would continue their conflicts without concern for the human beings who stood in their paths to "Ascension." Working on his understanding, Mercer created Aeon to subtly maneuver around the mages, counting on their disdain for the "sleepers."

Therefore, when the *Galatea* exploded and the first novas began erupting, certain highly-placed members of the Aeon Society recognized the truth, and while the magi squabbled in their shadow war Aeon was busy establishing Project Utopia. In this way Aeon stole the Sons of Ether's thunder and managed to derail the direction originally intended for the new paradigm.

Currently, there are agents of various allegiances within the monolith of Project Utopia. Henri Mazarin, a Son of Ether who betrayed the Technocracy, is highly placed within Utopia's Science and Technology division (as is Farah Rashoud, although she is not a mage). There are several with Technocracy leanings involved in Utopia as well, operating on the theory that getting control of the situation is more important than imposing a now-impossible paradigm.

In general, the Technocracy has been severely attenuated. The Traditions haven't truly been able to capitalize on that situation, mostly glad to just have the playing field level again. However, each of the Traditions has its own "party line" when it comes to novas.

The Akashic Brotherhood

The practicioners of Do have had the occasional conflicts with the Heaven Thunder Triad, the Nakato Gumi and Kuro-Tech (who bear an uncomfortable resemblance to their Technocracy enemies) but make no judgements on novas as a group. Each are individuals, each will be treated as such. Groups such as Bodhisattva Masato's Kamisama Buddhism, however, are disdained as setting artificial lines between novas and baselines. After all, Akashic Brothers do not have nodes. Such elitist views contradict Do.

The Celestial Chorus

The Chorus has been deeply affected by novas; while they are aware of their own part in creating the impression that these beings are powerful, possibly even divine, it frightens them how quickly splinter faiths have sprung up in their wake. In many ways, the novas are doing what the Chorus never could, and it frightens them. At present, with the war between the Technocracy and the Traditions a stalemate, certain members of the Chorus are considering going public with the truth of Ascension and the Pure Ones, as the Chorus sees it, of course.

The Cult of Ecstasy

"Hey, baby . . . we're already public!" Two of the better known novox singers in the world aren't novas at all; they're Ecstatics using magick. The Cult finds the nova phenomenon absolutely delightful; after all, it's all magick, isn't it? Science was really magick, and so is Quantum energy, and Taint is just Paradox under another name. Curani Apocrypha's third album went out over the OpNet and sold in mere minutes. He's very happy with the world he helped make.

Dreamspeakers

Novas like Antaeus and Bounty give the shamanic mages of this tradition a great deal of hope for the future. However, the Dreamspeakers know that this explanation is just as much a crutch as the old paradigm was; it's good that most sleepers accept their magick now, but it's still a crutch and not the truth. Eventually the Dreamspeakers hope to introduce the Metaphysic of Magick to the world at large . . . hopefully before groups like the Teragen can sell their

message of nova seperation.

Euthanatos

When a nova deserves the Good Death, the Euthanatos are more than eager to take the role as executioners. As soon as they finally grind the Technocracy into the dirt, they will demonstrate that having a gland in your brain is no match for an understanding of the truth behind reality's mask. The truth is death.

Order of Hermes

They have mixed feelings; on the one hand, the whole age of novas reminds them greatly of the "Great Experiment" that gave the world the word "Hermean." However, the novas are getting the admiration that really goes to them in the perfect world they seek to make.

Sons of Ether

The Sons tend to view the nova age through rose colored goggles. Mazarin is one of them, and there is a temptation to view the whole event as a throwback to bygone days. However, there are those within their ranks who are deeply disturbed, seeing the novas as another distraction given to the sleepers because the truth is unpalatable. For now, the debate mainly rages through the pages of *Paradigma*, but it could eventually reach out into action. Also, it's been necessary to watch out for the occasional Utopian Science and Technology team who mistake a Sons of Ether lab for something they need to regulate.

Verbena

The Verbena are concerned, to say the least, that the novas will be too easily swayed by their new power. After all, the body is the seat of the mind, and when the body is charged with energies the mind does not have the discipline to control properly . . . the increased aberrancy of some novas only seems to confirm their fears. Verbena mages are preparing for a "first strike" against the novas if it comes to war between baseline society and the Quantum-born.

Virtual Adepts

`"How cool is this!?"`

The Adepts are quite pleased with the results of their little experiment, even if they do have to play tag with Utopia's S&T division. The OpNet is certainly an improvement and can only herald the coming of a new age. Novas are Awakened beings, perhaps even a new breed of mage who doesn't need to study or worry about Paradox, and the end result is the same (the Adepts made sure that Rashoud printed that there was no theoretical limit to a nova's powers in order to ensure that reality would conspire to make it happen) in their eyes. Hell, maybe the Ascension is already *here*.

The Hollow Ones

There is no consensus, no single voice coming from the Hollowers. Uncertain they even *want* to fit in, the Hollow Ones are even less sure about novas, and won't say anything because that's what the others expect of them. They have noticed a disturbing trend, however . . . most of those who might have Awakened lately seem to be erupting as novas instead, as reality seeks to make everyone conform to the new principles. This could lead to the end of magick as the Traditions understand it, and terrifies those Hollowers who have begun to notice it.

The Pogrom becomes the Program

What of the Technocracy? Is this nova age a paradise, with the Greyfaces broken and humbled at the feet of their Tradition counterparts?

Hardly.

The Conventions have suffered a terrible blow, and are not now that reality-shaping power they once were. The machinery they created to control the sleepers is now seemingly in the hands of those same sleepers, and while it does not yet proclaim the Metaphysic of Magick for all to hear and understand, it does serve to convince the mundane herd that there is nothing wrong with seeing the occasional flying woman hurling lightning from her fingertips. Paradox still exists, of course . . . even in the nova age, there are still those who feel that momentary surge of disbelief when they see such marvels . . . but it is no longer the choke chain that serves to hold their enemies at bay.

However, all is far from lost. The Technocracy did not end up in charge of reality for six hundred years by being stupid.

Currently, a three-pronged attack is underway. An agent known only as "Thetis" serves the New World Order by co-ordinating an effort to control and harness novas to the Technocracy's ends. In her role as the head of Project Proteus, Thetis manipulates novas into combating the Marauders and their nova "chosen" (the true role of the Bahrain facility) as well as preparing for future conflicts against the Traditions. (Both Utopia and Proteus teams have seen action against Nephandi in the Kashmir region, and in fact created the nova conflict there as a cover for it.)

The second tier of the trident is already underway. By subtly leaking those actions that are less than savory on the part of Project Utopia and Proteus they hope to create extreme baseline/nova tensions, with an ultimate goal of frightening the baselines into rejecting nova powers (and thus, Vulgar Magick) as other, monstrous and "aberrant."

The third stage is to allow a war to occur between "aberrants" and "humanity." By subtly manipulating the outcome using their agents in various world governments, the Technocracy hopes to show that technology and human ingenuity can overcome the bizarre powers of the "aberrants" and be the salvation of humanity. Once this is accomplished, they will be free to once again dictate the course of human society.

For an idea of how this could come about, see the *Trinity* game. The Earth of 2120 outlined in that game could easily be subtly tweaked to be the result of a Greyface counter-gambit, if so desired. The Doyen become allies of the Conventions, Umbrood who share similar ideas about Magick and reality. The psi orders become the Technocracy's take on the Mazarin Gambit, a more orderly way to ensure that the occasional Vulgar Magick will be excused as "psi powers" by a grateful mundane herd.

As of 2008, the Conventions are still laying plans. For now, it suits them to let the Traditions busy themselves with their nova playthings and their ethical debates. When the time is right, they'll strike the match and plunge the entire world into war, killing millions.

Let the Wild Hunt Commence!

The Marauders are very, very happy.

They are also completely insane, but that's sort of beside the point. Now that the Greyfaces are weakened and Paradox set on its side, Marauders have been coming through in record numbers. After the most recent Technocracy war, however, record numbers for the Marauders would be a handful. It was the Marauders who led the assaults, running screaming into the fray . . . and events like Null-B's annihilation and Sao Paulo were the result.

However, while the nova age certainly has elements that would serve the Marauders very well indeed (some call it the new mythic age) and they *love* the Teragen. *(Yes, abandon humanity, explore your godhood . . . and come to us.)* It's hard to say that the Marauders have any actual *goal* in the nova age. They think they've won.

So far, it looks like they're right.

La Vita Nuova

And as for the novas themselves, they have the ability to escape the manipulations of the Magi. Their Quantum powers are merely unconscious manipulations of Quintessence itself. They suffer not at all from Paradox, as the sleepers have been led to believe that nova powers fit into the laws of "physics" and therefore are acceptable. Even better, novas have the potential to do *anything* thanks in no small part to the manipulations of the Virtual Adepts.

For now, the nova age of 2008 is unaware of the mages working below the surface. However, conflict is assured; the Aeon Society had dealings with "Mad Scientists" in the past who were connected to both the Technocracy and the Sons of Ether, Project Utopia's Science & Technology division has unwittingly busted several mages, and the ongoing war in Kashmir has been used as cover by Technocracy agents to eliminate Nephandi acolytes. None of them want to realize that their puppets are just about ready to cut the strings.

Novas have several advantages in this. First off, their powers come to them a lot more easily than True Magick, and while a newly erupted nova knows nothing of the Metaphysic of Magick, she doesn't need to. Secondly, the number of novas is increasing due to the latent human desire for wonder, while there are only a few mages left (less than two hundred) and their war among themselves has done much to weaken them still further. Finally, for all their magick, mages are human beings with physical frailties and to use their power is an act of will over reality. Nova powers work within reality, and their Quantum-charged bodies require no thought to manifest many superhuman abilities (which are called Mega-Attributes in the *Aberrant* game) that allow them to move faster, think on more levels and in general be superior to frail baseline flesh.

If a conflict comes, it could be anyone's game.

Crossing Over

Campaigning in the *Mage*/*Aberrant* world will certainly have its share of conflict, as the mages seek to understand this new world they've indirectly created and the novas deal with the behind the scenes manipulations of "The Subtle Ones." The Theme of such a campaign could be Revelations, as the lies humanity shelters itself behind are gradually stipped away in favor of the harsh truth; there are no absolutes, and the universe is what we make of it. Possible ideas for such a campaign include:

Mutability

A group of novas working for Project Utopia are assigned to track down and stop a "Teragen rogue" operating in Africa. Upon arrival, however, they discover Deus Carnivore, a Marauder Warlord seeking to bring about a new Mythic Age by breaching the Gauntlet and letting the creatures of the Umbra loose on Earth. Can even nova powers stop a madman with control over the fabric of reality itself? And even if they can stop him, how can they hold him? This could be the beginning of a merged campaign, as the discovery of a "nodeless nova" would no doubt lead to all sorts of complications . . . Project Proteus agents seeking to have him sent to Bahrain, S&T officers desperate to study him, and Teragen allies seeking to rescue him.

Brave New World

Henri Mazarin is respected as one of the discoverers of the M-R Node and a highly-trusted member of Project Utopia's S&T department, although not part of the leadership hierachy. While part of a Utopia mission to the Middle East, the Teragen attack and spirit him away, seeking to use his knowledge to free novas held at the Bahrain facility. Can a group of Tradition mages free Mazarin before he's forced to use his magick, and without giving themselves away as mages? If they fail, the secret behind the "nova age" could become public, leading to possible repercussions in the very nature of perceived reality. And how did the Teragen know to attack Mazarin's mission? Did the Technocracy spill the beans, or is someone else responsible?

The Nova-age Prometheus

A mage from the Progenitors is fascinated by novas; she seeks to come to a complete understanding of the way the laws of physics and genetics have merged and altered in these new beings. Using her powerful Life magick, she seems to offer a cure for "Taint" to a few novas, but really seeks living subjects for vivisection. Can the novas root out her corruption before her new creation, "Cain," can unleash its nova powers upon the world?

The Digital Web

The Virtual Adept online chantry is under attack from a new direction; novas with the ability to manipulate computers have discovered the Adepts pocket Realm in the Omaha, Nebraska area, and have led Utopia"s S&T enforcers there. While some of the mages must arrange for the S&T division to be called off, others must go on-line to prevent the secrets of the Virtual Adepts from being revealed. Can they keep from being discovered . . . and if they *can*, should they?

The Threat From Beyond
(With thanks to Steve Ditko and Stan Lee)

Curani Apocrypha, a popular novox singer, comes to the novas with a problem. A force from the Deep Umbra, an Umbrood Lord of enormous power, is coming back to Earth now that Paradox has been lessened. However, after the recent Traditions/Technocracy war, there aren"t enough magi left to help the Human Mask stop an Umbrood who holds entire Realms in his control. Will the novas help fill the void and step boldy into the Umbra?

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The Awakening is a **GURPS Space** adventure for any number of players, although 3-6 players is suggested. The adventure can also be geared towards a single player and a GM. This would provide a gaming experience quite different than group play. The single character would have to be even more resourceful and careful.

The average point range should be about 100-120 points, with 40 points for Disadvantages. The tech level is roughly TL 8-9 depending on the device(s) in question.

The only book needed to play this adventure is the **GURPS Basic Set 3rd Edition**. Other books that might prove useful in running this adventure or expanding it into a full fledged campaign include, but are not limited to: **GURPS Cyberpunk** and/or **CthulhuPunk**, **GURPS Cyberworld**, **GURPS Ultra Tech I** and **II**, **GURPS Bio-Tech**, **GURPS Reign of Steel**, **GURPS Traveller**, **GURPS Aliens**, **GURPS Time Travel**, **GURPS Black Ops**, and **GURPS Psionics**. Mix and match the above combinations, or don't use anything! This adventure is highly customizable, so tweak it to suite your gaming needs.

[?]

This adventure was inspired by the short story "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream," by Harlan Ellison.

Game Master Notes

1. Game Masters should let the players create new PCs for this adventure. Player Characters should top out at about 40 points for Disadvantages, and they should choose a broad range of skills in relation to the tech level (8-9). The disadvantages should reflect the severe conditions of the complex (see the background information).
2. If you are running this game with more than three players, divide the group in half and play the first section with that half of the group. The other half of your group should leave the room; call them back in after their PCs have been rescued from their damaged cryo tanks.
3. This adventure has the possibly of alternate motives, events and endings. They are presented at the end of the adventure; the GM

should decide upon which motive, events and ending(s) will be used
before running the adventure.

Background

Some or all of the background information may vary depending on how this adventure will be used, as either a one-shot adventure or as an introduction to a campaign. Also the background information may differ due to the adjustments with alternate motives, campaign style, different endings, etc.

The characters are part of a secret government operation called Project:Backlash. This project was instituted because, at the time, the human race was attacked by an extraterrestrial force.

This alien force showed no signs of mercy, and they had no known weaknesses. During the war the humans found out that the marauding aliens were very susceptible to a terrible cocktail of terrestrial viruses -- some natural and some man-made. Of course, the use of this new viral weapon wouldn't help the war effort; too many (if not all) of the humans would be killed. The humans were desperately losing the war, and the aliens apparently wanted the Earth for their own reasons. Drastic measures had to be taken. Several human governments wanted to employ a "scorched earth" policy, destroying everything so the aliens had nothing. Then they had a better idea.

Rather than let the aliens kill off the human race and inhabit our planet without any repercussions, Project: Backlash went into effect. A secure mountain site was selected, and the humans began the construction of an underground base. The base would be powered by geothermal and the newly discovered cold fusion process. Dozens of civilians and military personnel were chosen, mostly because of their skills and psychological makeup. The chosen were secretly trained, and after the base was completed, they were put into suspended animation (cryo sleep). The computer systems were designed to run on very little power, and several backup systems were also in place. The operatives were "scheduled" to wake in fifty years. Upon awakening, they could analyze the situation and launch a retributive strike if the humans had failed in their effort against the invading alien menace. If the invading alien force had conquered the Earth, the virus cocktail would be used. No humans would be left to be affected; those that were still alive would probably be slaves or worse.

If the alien force had somehow been driven off the planet, then the men and women of Project: Backlash would observe the situation and decide when to exit the secret complex. It was to be a perfect plan of revenge from a race that died long ago, or so we'd hoped.

About ten years after all the operatives of Project: Backlash had been put into their cryo sleep, there was a terrible earthquake beneath the mountain complex. This disrupted the geothermal power supply and caused massive damage to the complex. Several computer systems were destroyed in the process, and the fifty years came and went. The operatives remained in their cryo sleep for over 185 years.

Then, by some twist of fate, there was another earthquake. This triggered a massive power failure. The resulting backup systems, upon a power failure, would awaken the sleepers. The operatives finally awoke from their cryo sleep, having overslept by 135 years.

Due to an unforeseen after affect of such an extended cryo sleep, some of the operatives are suffering from or have been affected by some mild brain damage, mental illness, permanent long-term memory loss (total amnesia), and other physical disabilities.

The player characters are the last batch of operatives to awake. The first group of recently awakened operatives have already banded together and have begun exploring the base. They are led by a psychotic Lieutenant named David Cashe. Cashe believes that the alien force is still out there, even though surveillance equipment and satellite contacts are gone. He wants to go through with the retributive strike. His dealings with the player characters will be the main

conflict of the adventure.

Cashe wants to be the last human on earth. If all things on Earth are going to die, he wants to be the last human to die -- the last of the human race. Cashe finds some sort of twisted honor with being the last human to walk the Earth.

Eventually a loud banging noise begins in the motor pool area. The vault door that leads to the outside is under attack. No one knows who or what is making the noise. All visual and surveillance equipment is inoperative. Cashe thinks it's the aliens trying to gain access to the base. The reality of it is actually up to the GM. The GM need not determine who is tunneling into the base until they break through . . . which will no doubt happen shortly before or after the Project:Backlash weapons are activated.

Timeline of Events

This is a chronological list of events that will happen during the course of the adventure. The events are not listed with an actual clock time; rather the events are listed in the order in which they will happen. Feel free to adjust or alter as needed.

1.
    - First Player awakens from cryo sleep. Escapes from cryo tank.
    - Lt. Cashe awakens from cryo sleep.
2.
    - First Player may free other players from their tanks.
    - Lt. Cashe frees other operatives from cryo sleep.
3.
    - Exploration of base. Possibly gain access to secondary Command Center.
    - Lt. Cashe gains access to upper level and begins looking for armory and command and control center. He is still confused, but will remember why he's been in cryo sleep (see Project: Backlash notes).
4.
    - Lt. Cashe discovers armory and arms himself and a chosen few (believes others are too mentally unstable for weapons at this time.)
5.
    - A few awakened operatives attack the PCs with bare hands. They're insane and beyond help (a random encounter, and not part of Lt. Cashe's group).
    - When the PCs try to gain access to the level/armory, they will encounter resistance from Cashe's underlings. The underlings are armed with blasters, knives, etc. They might be persuaded or tricked. GMs are encouraged to roleplay this encounter, as it may go in any direction.
6.
    - PCs should run into Cashe soon. He will explain that he plans to launch/activate the weapons.
    - Some of Cashe's underlings want to make their way to the outside world and look around. Cashe won't stand for such insubordination. He'll execute personnel if that is what it takes to keep the people in line.
7.
    - A loud banging noise begins to sound from the upper levels. Someone is trying to get into the base! Cashe sends a few soldiers to investigate.
8.
    - Cashe pushes to activate the weapons. He attempts to take control of the command center. His own people will turn on him to subdue him, in order to stop the launch/activation of the weapons.
    - If Cashe is subdued or killed, one of his turncoat underlings will activate the weapons by surprise.
9.
    - If PCs go along with Cashe, he will activate the weapons, then he will eventually kill the PCs (see Backlash notes).
10.
    - Should PCs survive this long, the banging in the motor pool becomes louder and clearer. The intruders eventually gain entrance. There is no actual time limit here; that is left up to the GM. Pick a very

inconvenient time for the Player Characters to make a split decision, e.g.: Cashe's countdown to weapon launch vs. possible contact/communication with intruders.

Describe the aliens any way you want. Use **GURPS Aliens** for ideas, or go with the standard "Grey" alien: big black eyes, small gray colored body (see **GURPS Black Ops** for more information on the Greys). Use the stats for Lt. Cashe's men as merely quick stats. Beef up the aliens with more weapons and defenses from the **Basic Set** or **GURPS: Ultra Tech I** or **II**. GM must determine if intruders are hostile or friendly depending on the campaign's direction.

If this is being played as a one-shot adventure and not an introduction to a campaign; then the intruders will be hostile aliens bent on eliminating the last human threat (see event #11). They will kill the PCs at first chance. Modify text and adventure as needed.

11.
- If the PCs fail to activate their weapons, let them know that they are, or were, the last humans on the Earth. They have failed in their mission to avenge the death of billions.

Notes

Remember that there is little power to the complex. Lights will be flickering. Doors, computers, cameras, surveillance equipment and monitors do not work very well, and have intermittent problems. There are flashing red lights every twenty feet in the main hallways and in each room. The Player Characters can turn these off with several successful Computer Op/Hacking in one of the command centers.

Also remember that this adventure has a timeline of events. The location descriptions are just that: descriptions of the rooms. The Timeline of Events will detail when and, to some degree, where the events take place. Much is up to the gaming style of the Game Master and the group.

Location Descriptions

A Cold Start

1. Start Room. Pick one individual player and read the boxed text to them. The adventure begins in room 1 on the map; all locations are numbered and correspond with the like numbered description.

> You awake with a gasp. Cold air rushes in to fill your lungs. Everything that you see is covered by a fine layer of frost.
>
> You are in some sort of metal cylinder. There are several blinking lights on a panel directly in front of your face. You are very cold, and you are only clothed in a dark blue jump suit.
>
> Your limbs appear to be held in place. You can move your cramped fingers, and they touch buttons. The panel in front of you changes its display. It shows a series of buttons and controls. Each control lights up when your hand or fingers make contact.

The player can roll an IQ -3 to see if they can figure out the panel and how to free themselves. If the player fails the roll more than three times, the tank will automatically release the restraints and the PC can lift the cryo tank's lid. This will take a ST-2 roll to succeed in lifting the tank's lid far enough to attempt an escape.

All skills and attribute rolls will be modified in some way due to such an extended cryonic sleep. If no modifier is listed assume a -2; some modifiers will be more and some will be less. This will only last about two hours of game time, or until the PCs find the Med Center and the appropriate drug for counteracting the sleep effect.

Upon opening the cylinder, read the following:

> When the metal cylinder opens, you see several other metal cylinders set into the nearby walls. You cannot make out what is in the cylinders due to the frost build-up. Metal girders stab down into the room and wires are dangling from collapsed ceiling panels. Red flashing lights are in every corner of the room. There are five other metal cylinders in an octagonal room. On one side of the room is a door, but it is blocked by a pile of debris.

The player may attempt to open the other cylinders. An IQ -5 or a computer operation skill at a -2 is required to get the computer to open the other cryo tanks. Once the players in this room are free they can attempt to free the other players. To clear the debris a simple ST -2 roll be required from each character.

> The door opens to reveal a small room with another door directly across from you. The door is eventually forced open. Broken ceiling panels, frayed wires, scorch marks on the floor, walls and ceiling tell of a great catastrophe. A five foot wide metal girder stabs through the middle of the hall; crumbled concrete is everywhere. There are large cracks in the ceiling, walls, and floor.

2. Cryo Tank Room. The crevasse in front of the door is about 5 feet across . . . and over 35 feet deep! The sliding door needs to be pried open by two people with a ST roll -2 (cumulative with previous modifiers) for each person.

> This room is totally dark, and it smells like death. The emergency lights from the hallway give witness to a ghastly scene. There are six metal cylinders, much like the room that you left. A large support beam has collapsed and fallen onto two of the cylinders; they are totally crushed. The four other cylinders' control panels do not seem to be working. You can see a rotted corpse in each of the four cylinders.

2a. Collapsed Room. This room is totally collapsed and there is nothing to see in here.

> After opening the door you look into a room where the entire ceiling has collapsed. All cylinders in this room are crushed and any occupants are far beyond help.

3. Cryo Tank Room. The rest of the PCs are in this room. Follow the door opening rules from above.

> Upon opening the door to this well-lit room you see six more metal cylinders. Three are working and you can see people inside; they are shaking their heads, trying to wake up. The sixth cylinder is torn in half due to a large metal girder jutting eight feet out into the room.

If the GM wishes to have NPCs in the other cylinders, that is fine; just adjust the descriptions appropriately.

4. Crevasse Room. Use same door modifiers for this door also.

> You can hear your echo of the door opening in this darkened area.

This entire section of the complex has collapsed due to some catastrophic event. If players insist on having their PCs jump down or climb down, make them regret it. The jump would kill them, and climbing down will be more hassle

than it is worth and will no doubt cause serious injuries.

5. Dead Hall. Use the same door modifiers for this door.

> Upon opening the door an overwhelming stench floods the hall.

Have players make a Will roll with a -2 modifier due to the incredible stench. Failure means that the character will suffer from several minutes of vomiting and weakness. If the player fails their roll by more than 10 than that person will develop a mild (10 point Disadvantage) phobia (necrophobia -- fear of the dead).

If player rolls successfully, they will be immune from all similar rolls in the future.

> When you gather your senses and begin to look into the darkened hall, what you see chills your blood. The hallway is packed with bodies. They are stacked nearly five deep towards the doorway. Bodies piled on top of bodies. Several are sprawled towards the end of the hallway. Rotted corpses leaning against walls in their eternal sleep. It appears as though the door was sealed shut and these people were unable to gain their way to freedom. They are in advanced stages of decomposition, so this must have happened several weeks ago.

6. Cryo Tank Room. All doors to these rooms are open.

> This room has very little structural damage. All cylinders are empty. The control boards have some minor scorching, but seem to be in working order.

7. Cryo Tank Room. Doors to this area are already open, some have been left ajar.

> This room has some cracks in the floor and walls. A few ceiling panels have fallen, burned and frayed wires spill into the room from the holes in the ceiling. Half of all cylinders in this room are empty; the other half are occupied. A grisly and rotted visage stares out from within its once icy casket.

8. Cryo Tank Room. This is area is where Lt. David Cashe and his cohorts were put into their cryo sleep.

> This room has very little structural damage. All cylinders are empty. The control boards have some minor scorching, but seem to be in working order.

9. Body In Hallway. This person died from a broken neck inflicted by Lt. Cashe.

> As you walk down the hall, you see a dead body curled up on the floor. The body is clothed in the exact same type of jumpsuit. The body appears to have died several hours ago.

10. Rubble and a Collapsed Ceiling.

> This room is like many others, with a collapsed ceiling, ruined cryo tanks, and the stench of death is everywhere. It appears as though half of this room's former occupants have survived. Several tanks are empty.

10a. The Collapsed Hallway.

> This hallway has totally collapsed. There is simply no way to get past all the rubble. A rotted hand protrudes from the rubble. Another victim of a forgotten catastrophe.

This section of the base has been left open so that GMs who want may expand the complex for further campaign play. With a little digging this area can be accessed. Remember to adjust the description as needed. Possible areas for exploration might be a science lab, cloning facilities, power armor and heavy weapons area. Maybe a proto-type temporal manipulation device (time travel?). Robots and A.I. could play large part in obstructing/aiding characters and Lt. Cashe.

11. Double doors. Follow the usual door opening rules (see description 2 for door modifiers).

> The hallway ends with a pair of doors. The one on the left says "Med Center." The door to the right says "Secondary Command."

12. Elevator Shafts. Each door requires a ST roll to open. This level is the bottom floor of the base.

> These elevator shafts appear to have literally fallen into disrepair. They are obviously in a non-functioning order.

The characters can climb up through the elevator escape hatch and scale the elevator cables, or use the service ladder to the next level. However the doors still take a ST roll to open. This is hard to do from the ladder without a chance of falling!

13. Stairway.

The stairs are probably the only thing that works in this whole base!

> This appears to be a fully functioning stairwell. There are some cracks and debris littering the stairs, but, since they're made of concrete, they seem safe. They lead up into darkness.

14. Secondary Command Entrance.

> These doors have "Command Personnel Only" written in bright yellow letters.

These doors are locked with interior bolts. They need to be "hot-wired" from the control panel. Electronics: Security Systems, Lockpicking, Computer Hacking are all applicable skills. The modifier for this skill should be between -3 to -5 depending on the character's idea. This area has its own backup power supply, so computers and equipment tend to function a little bit more reliably here.

Alternately, GMs could use a bio-scan device: palm, hand, face, breath, eye, retina, blood, DNA scan. Only military personnel of Captain rank or higher are granted access.

15. Secondary Command Center.

> Inside this room red flashing lights assault your eyes. Monitors flicker and try to maintain a picture. Some screens are cracked and the room smells like burning oil.

Characters may use their computer skills (with a -3 modifier -- see room 16) to tap into the base's project database and gain some very valuable information about Project: Backlash. Several characters will not be found among the records. There has been some computer damage and file corruption with all the seismic activity and damage to the base.

The GM can feed any background information to the players as he sees fit. Information on other base personnel, outside conditions, and information regarding the last 100 years may or may not be available (up to GM -- giving players very little information is recommended). This is because the base had to maintain a low profile in regards to energy consumption, communication and activity. The players will have to make big decisions on their own and without any input from outside sources!

16. Wiring Closet.

> This small room smells like burning oil. There are large scorch marks on the ceiling and walls. The walls are covered with computer equipment, components and thick strands of wiring erupt from one wall only to disappear into another.

This room is where all the components for the secondary command center are located. There is some minor damage to the components due to a small fire. This will produce a -3 modifier to computer rolls due to malfunctioning equipment. Anyone with Electronics: Computers can make an attempt to repair the equipment. There is a small tool kit stored behind the door.

17. Med Bay. The rules for opening these doors are the same as location 14.

> These doors have "Med Bay" written in large yellow letters across the front.

Upon access to the Med Bay read the following:

> The Med Bay has seen some better days. There is a large pile of debris in the center of the room. Several support beams have collapsed and fallen across several beds. There is a set of doors separating the area. The other half of the area is much the same as the first. Although there is a large floor-to-ceiling cabinet that is labeled "Supplies."

The PCs can find basic medical supplies and simple antibiotics. There is also a stimulant drug (pill) that will counteract the cryo sleep fatigue; this drug will remove any cryo sleep modifiers or penalties. If more than two hours of game time have elapsed then the cryo sleep fatigue has already worn off; remove all cryo sleep modifiers.

18. Operation Room/Recovery.

> This room appears to be a small operating room. Most of the equipment has been destroyed due to debris and small fires.

The players might be able to find small knives, scalpels, and other sharp instruments -- about 1D-2 worth of useful "weapon type" tools.

19. Equipment/Uniform Closet. PCs may be attacked at this point by Cashe's underlings. See Timeline.

> This door reads "Equipment and Uniform Storage." The door is slightly ajar.

This area has extra jumpsuits, socks, underwear, boots, pants, T-shirts, light and heavy jackets, and many other garments.

20. Washing Area.

> This area was for the washing and drying of uniforms and linens. Several large washers are in the middle, and dryers line the walls. Piles of debris dot the floor. A large support beam divides the room in half.

21. Security Door/Power Management. This door is locked. A large metal bolt runs through the door. It must be blasted open; one shot will do. A successful Electronics: Security System roll will also open the door.

> Debris clutters the hall which ends with a single door. This door looks like all the rest in the complex. The only difference are the words "Restricted Area-Power Management Systems -- Command Personnel Only" painted upon the door.

22. Power Management Center. This is where the base personnel manage the Cold Fusion Reactor and the Geo-Thermal Reactor. The Cold Fusion reactor is online at about 15-19% capacity. The Geo-Thermal Reactor has shut itself down due to the earthquakes. Neither reactors can be set to overload or self-destruct. They have too many fail-safe mechanisms. The base is *not* rigged with a self-destruct mechanism. The designers didn't feel that the personnel, who are essentially on a suicide mission, needed such an option.

If the power is safely shut down, then any attempts to launch the weapons will fail. There needs to be a minimum amount of power to run the various programs and activate the weapons.

> The door opens to reveal a room that overlooks a larger room that contains large machinery. This room, however, has a large control panel on either side of the room.

23. Reactor Room. This area has no real value for the players. If the Cold Fusion Reactor is severely damaged, it will shut down. This will plunge the entire base into darkness.

> This room is cluttered with debris, fallen support beams, frayed wiring, and one inactive Geo-Thermal Reactor. The machinery is covered with a fine layer of dust.

24. Kitchen/Food Prep. The only food that is left is about two cupboards worth of canned foods. The refrigeration units have lost their power months ago and all the frozen and refrigerated items inside have melted and/or spoiled. Eating this food will make one extremely, life-threateningly ill. There are about 2D knives that are available for use as weapons.

> This room has a strange smell. It is coming from the large silver refrigeration units.
>
> This was once the kitchen. The majority of the major appliances have been destroyed by collapsed walls and ceilings.

25. Mess Hall.

> This Mess Hall is in total disarray. There are dozens of tables and chairs scattered in a

haphazard manner about the room. Large chunks of ceiling and wall have collapsed at various places around the room.

There is nothing of value within this room, although broken chairs and tables can be disassembled so that the steel tubing can be used as a clubs.

26. Showers and Lavatory. The water works, and there is plenty of hot water.

This room is obviously the base's shower room and bathroom. From the layer of dust on everything, no one has been here for quite some time. The room seems to have escaped serious damage.

27. Waste Recycling/Reclamation. The system is working, to some degree. (No, a person cannot be shoved into the unit; it will turn off if something that big is forced into the chute.)

This appears to be the waste recycling/reclamation area. There are large chutes into which various items are deposited. The whole system is automated and needs no human interaction. No one seems to have ever used the system.

28. Armory. Lt. Cashe and his people have already been here. There are two of Lt. Cashe's men on guard here. The two operatives who are guarding the armory are actually in the armory. They are armed with Blaster Pistols (B208) and Large Knives. They have Second Chance Hardcorps System Body Armor (B211). Not knowing what is really going on, they will probably engage in conversation with the Player Characters. Reaction checks may apply, but role-playing the encounter is preferred.

The guards are under orders to not let anyone, unless accompanied by Lt. Cashe and by his order, have access to the equipment. If the guards are pressed they will fall back on their orders. If attacked they will shoot to maim. They don't want to have to kill anyone, but they will if necessary.

29. Bodies. There are two bodies here with burn marks on their chests. They were killed by Lt. Cashe for trying to make a run for weapons. Cashe didn't think they were of sound mind to handle weapons, so he shot them.

Two bodies are sprawled out in the hallway. They have large burn marks on their chests. They appear to be dead.

30. The Armory's Contents. (This is only what is available right now; the rest has been taken by Lt. Cashe.) In the armory the following items can be found (all are found in the **GURPS Basic Set**):

- 3 Blaster Pistols (1 clip each)
- 2 Blaster Rifles (1 clip each)
- 4 Large Knives
- 3 Small Knives
- 3 Second Chance Hardcorps System Body Armor (with Gentex PASGT Helmet)
- 2 Combat Infantry Dress (with CID Helmet)
- 2 Second Chance Standard Vests (with Gentex PASGT helmet)
- Most equipment under the Modern Equipment section in the Basic Set on page 213, several of each, not counting the vehicles. The food would be mostly Concentrated Rations (by the dozen).

This large, well-stocked room has rows and rows of survival equipment. The door to the west has collapsed under some immense weight. Support beams, girders, and debris clutter

the already full room.

31. Primary Command Center. This room has quite an amount of debris and structural damage. Monitors and screens are smashed. There are, however, several terminals in operational order. Follow the general description of room 15 for the use of the computer system and other notes. They apply here as well.

Player Characters will no doubt run into Lt. Cashe here. This may be where the PCs originally hear the strange "banging" noise coming from the level above them. The door, surprisingly, is not difficult to open.

The doors to this room say "Primary Command Center -- Authorized Personnel Only!"

This large room has a 30' foot vaulted ceiling with large display monitors on the south wall. Several of the monitors are cracked and broken. There are two rows of terminals. There are support beams that have fallen across the rows and smashed millions of dollars worth of equipment.

32. Rest Area. This is the base's other bathroom.

This appears to be another rest area. Stalls line the outside of the room with sinks against the far wall. There is very little debris or damage here.

33. Motor Pool. This room is where the vehicles are kept and maintained. The vault door to the south, leads up and out to the concealed entrance at the base of a mountain. The distance from the vault doors to the actual base entrance is about 4,000 feet. This is where the aliens will gain entrance to the base. No vehicles are in immediate working order. It would take a day or two to get them back up and running.

This room has seen massive amounts of damage. There are support beams across two of the ATVs and one of the vehicles has been totally crushed from a collapsed ceiling. Large cracks and crevasses in the floor make walking difficult, if not dangerous.

34. Vehicle Diagnostic Equipment. Almost any vehicle can be repaired here. There are common spare parts, computer equipment, and plenty of tools to keep a mechanic happy for a lifetime. The ceiling (what is left) is 20' high.

Two large vehicle lifters with pits are the main part of this vehicle repair area. Computerized vehicle diagnostic equipment and an assortment of tools, fluids and spare parts complement this area.

35. Fueling Pumps/Battery Recharger. These pumps provide any liquid form fuel such as gasoline or diesel fuel. There are also a battery recharger for almost any type of cell.

There are two archaic fuel pump dispensers and a variety of battery charging stations.

36. Vault Door. This door will come under heavy assault by the invading alien force. It will be up to the GM when the aliens actually breach the barriers. It should be at a totally inconvenient time for the player characters.

This gigantic metal door is over 15' high. The double doors have a small control panel on the right that controls the door's giant locking mechanism. This thing could take quite a bit

of abuse before breaking.

Non-Player Characters

The NPC stats listed below are meant as quick and dirty NPCs. Should the GM require more details, they should flesh out the NPCs to fit adventure. The only real Non-Player Character that is a major plot point is Lt. Cashe. Cashe sees his "soldiers" as just cannon fodder.

Lt. David Cashe

Lt. Cashe is totally insane. He remembers his mission, he just can't see it without rage-colored glasses. Unfortunately, Cashe is doing the right thing. He's following orders. There are still aliens out there, but Cashe does not know this, and he's willing to take that chance. He's certain that the human race was on the losing end of the war.

ST: 13
IQ: 12
DX: 11
HT: 12

Skills: Beam Weapons (blaster)-14, Stealth-14, Knife-13, NBC Training-13, Biology-10, Beam Weapons (laser)-12, Gunner (laser)-12, Gunner (Missile)-11, Guns (grenade launcher)-10, Interrogation-11, Scrounging-11, Electronics Op (Computers)-12, Electronics Op (Security systems)-11, Computer Operation-13, Brawling-14, Intelligence Analysis-11, First Aid-13, Detect Lies-11, Tactics-11, Strategy-10.

Advantages: Military Rank (15), Night Vision (10), Immunity to Disease (10).

Disadvantages: Fanaticism (-15), Sense of Duty(-15) (To avenge the Human Race), Intolerance: Insubordination (-10).

Equipment: 1 Blaster Pistol, 1 Blaster Rifle, 1 Large Knife, Jumpsuit, Boots, Watch, 1 clip in each weapon, Combat Infantry Dress (body armor).

The Soldiers of Lt. Cashe

These men are totally loyal to Lt. Cashe. He did, after all, save them from being trapped within their cryo tanks. They are willing to die for him, and most will. They don't have the same fanaticism for destroying the alien invaders as that of Cashe. These soldiers would like to make an educated guess, rather than just a wild one.

Most of the men suffer from a phobia or some sort of mental disorder. Their cryo sleep and the drug interaction necessary for the cryo sleep had some lasting effects. (The PCs only get bad hangovers from their cryo sleep.) Therefore, Lt. Cashe has decided that only a trusted few will have weapons and armor. Most of these men will also be willing to listen to another, more rational, point of view.

Quick Stats for Soldiers of Lt. Cashe (20)

ST: 12
IQ: 10
DX: 11
HT: 10

Skills: Beam Weapons (blaster)-12, Stealth-11, Knife-12, NBC Training-10,Beam Weapons (laser)-11, Scrounging-10, Electronics Op (Computers)-11, Electronics Op (Security systems)-11, Computer Operation-11, Brawling-13.

Advantages: Military Rank (15).

Disadvantages: Sense of Duty (-15) (To Military and Humanity), Intolerance: Civilians (-10)

Equipment: Most of Lt. Cashe's soldiers will not have weapons, only the most trusted and mentally stable. This is all according to Cashe, and his warped reality. The number of soldiers and what they are armed with is listed below:

- **2 Guards in Armory:** 1 Blaster Pistol, 1 Blaster Rifle, 1 Large Knife, Jumpsuit, Boots, Watch, 1 clip in each weapon. Combat Infantry Dress (body armor).
- **6 Soldiers:** Second Chance Hardcorps System Body Armor (with Gentex PASGT Helmet), 1 Blaster Pistol-1 clip already in weapon, 1 Large Knife, jumpsuit, watch, boots.
- **10 Soldiers:** Jumpsuit, watch, boots (no weapons -- Cashe believes they're too unstable).

Cashe shot the last two soldiers outside the armory.

Alien Invaders (Quick Stats)

GMs should feel free to alter these stats to appropriately reflect their campaign; he may even want to throw in some *Psionics* for added flavor.

ST: 11
IQ: 11
DX: 14
HT: 12

Skills: Beam Weapons (blaster):15, Stealth: 14, Beam Weapons (laser): 15, Gunner (Laser):14, Gunner (Tank Cannon): 15, Electronics Op (Computers): 11, Electronics Op (Security systems): 12, Computer Operation: 11.

Equipment: Blast Rifle, Blaster Pistol. Their armor will be equivalent to the Combat Infantry Dress, except the following: DR 55 areas 9-11 & 17-18.

Alternate Endings and Options

This is a list of story elements that can be changed, literally on the fly, rendering an entirely different adventure altogether. No two sessions need to be the same! Some adventure details may need to be modified regarding an Alternate Ending Option.

1. Aliens never conquered the Earth. They left because it was too polluted and dirty. The humans have unlocked the secrets of the alien technology. The humans have finally put aside all their differences and the Earth has entered a new golden age. The recent earthquake gave away the position of the base. Earth's officials, having never known about this secret base, mount a rescue operation. Will their surprise rescue doom this new paradise? Will the base survivors have triggered an apocalyptic event?
2. Aliens are still on Earth, but the war is over. The humans and aliens have opened a dialogue and found out the whole war was a big misunderstanding! Who knew? The aliens have integrated the humans into the Galactic Community. Will the rescue mission to free the forgotten operatives doom the planet (see #1)?
3. The humans developed super-smart robots to defend the planet. They drove off the invading aliens, but unfortunately, the robots were too smart. There was an A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) uprising (see *GURPS: Reign of Steel* for more ideas). The humans hid their best personnel away for a retributive strike against the A.I.(s) or to repopulate the desolate planet. Do the operatives try to contact the aliens and ask for help?
4. The characters discover a hidden level where there are dozens of cloning tanks. Lt. Cashe wants to make an army of deranged soldiers to wage war upon the surface survivors, whoever that may be!

Adaptations

This adventure can be easily adapted to almost any science fiction roleplaying game; below are some suggestions and ideas. Modifications to the specific details of the adventure will be necessary, but that shouldn't be too difficult.

- *Alternity:* This adventure would work well with a home brew *Alternity* campaign, and GMs should have no trouble dropping it into a *Star*Drive* campaign either.
- *Babylon Project:* The base could be the result of a secret Earth Force and/or Psi Corps operation. The base has been all but forgotten after the Earth/Minbari War. The base was hidden on a world that the Minbari now hold. Will the actions of those inside incite new aggressions?
- *Fading Suns:* This base would be a remnant of the First or Second Republic. The PCs are in a base that has loads of Forbidden Technology, and Inquisitors don't need the players causing that kind of havoc.
- *Rifts/Phase World:* The operatives could be from the time before the Rifts. They awaken into a dark and dangerous world. The Coalition States would quickly gain the operative's trust. In a Phase World setting the PCs could be members of a resistance cell against the Transgalactic Empire. The Kreeghor are knocking at the door and time is running out.
- *Star Wars:* The player characters are Clone Wars leftovers. The Empire/Rebel Alliance has discovered this base and want to stop/help the characters. Is there a Jedi in the house? The player characters are in a secret cloning facility; are they themselves clones?
- *Traveller/GURPS Traveller:* The characters could be agents leftover from the fall of the Second Imperium. Maybe the characters are a sub-project of the Phoenix Project? Did the Terrans have a Scortched Earth plan ready during the Solamni Rim War?
- *Trinity:* The characters are "colonists" awakening from their cryo sleep. They discover their psi powers and realize that they were just bait for a large band of Aberrants. Will they be able to hold off the threat long enough to be rescued? Why were they setup to lure the Aberrants out? Who is pulling the strings? What do they know that they shouldn't? Where are they?
- *Waste World:* The characters are secret commandos put here (exiled?) so that when the Metro Zone (pick one) needs them, they're ready (imprisoned in cryo sleep?). The characters awake before the time is right. Who's at the door? Who did this to them?

Pyramid Review

Warhammer, 6th Edition

Published by [Games Workshop](#)

Designed by Rick Priestley and Tuomas Pirinen

Boxed set; $74.99

Warhammer has been synonymous with miniature gaming for years. It is a game eagerly devoured by young gamers, scorned by old grognards, and envied by those who don't have the time, skill, or wallet for a horde of beautifully-painted miniatures.

After disappearing for a few months, *Warhammer* has been recently re-released in a brand new 6th edition. As with all Games Workshop's releases, the components are gorgeous. It comes with two ready-to-play armies -- the Empire, which is reminiscent of a Renaissance military with handgunners, cannons, and armored knights; and the nasty Orcs, complete with a boar-drawn chariot, archers, warriors, and a general. The game comes with a nice cardstock and plastic building, numerous dice, rulers, and templates, and a gargantuan, beautifully-illustrated 288-page rulebook.

Be prepared to spend several hours assembling the components, even if you don't intend to paint them. Some gamers find this the joy of miniatures gaming; others will pull their hair out cutting the plastic miniatures from their sprues and gluing them to their bases.

The rulebook is very comprehensive, especially when compared to older editions of *Warhammer*. It contains complete rules for battles, war machines, sieges, skirmishes (using the rules from the recently-released Mordheim game), and magic. Furthermore, it contains stats and point values for all units in the *Warhammer* universe, from High Elves and Dwarves to the Vampire Counts and Lizardmen. Of course, those wanting all the history and special abilities of their favorite army will probably want to buy the corresponding army books, also being re-released in the coming months. It is these books, along with special and elite units, that turn *Warhammer* into very expensive hobby.

Those not familiar with the *Warhammer* system will find it well-explained here. While perfectly functional, the system has aged a bit and is not as streamlined as it could be. Moves, maneuvers, and charges are done first, followed by shooting and melee combat. Combat is resolved by rolling handfuls of dice. Basically, each miniature in combat rolls a single die to hit; his target is based on a comparison of weapon skill. "Hits" are rerolled, now with the unit's Strength comparing with the target's Toughness. Lastly, these "wounds" can be nullified by the target's armor.

The end result is that a round of combat takes three dice rolls, two of which involve looking at simple charts. A modern system could probably boil that down to two or less die rolls and no charts at all.

Therein lies the criticism of the system. It is one-step too many for gamers wanting a quick, easily played wargame, and yet not sophisticated enough for the gamer who wants authenticity and a feel for detailed simulation. The *Warhammer* system lands exactly in between those extremes, and thus appeals to neither. To its credit, after playing a few games the die rolls and charts become second-hand, and the game is greatly speeded. But there are quite a few mechanics that could have been streamlined further, though with risk of alienating the previous editions' fans.

Unfortunately, *Warhammer* does not come with a reference card. There is simply no excuse for this in a game that relies on its to-hit and damage charts so much. Also, while it comes with over 70 plastic miniatures, the game becomes markedly more exciting with twice that number. To be fair, this is largely true of every miniatures game out there.

Basic boxed sets are just not enough to get the full experience; more is almost always better in this hobby.

The magic system has been completely overhauled by this new edition. While it used to rely on cards, it has been paired down into a simple dice system. Each army has its own spell list, and each turn its wizards generate dice that are used to cast them. Some spells are more difficult than others, and the player must use more dice to cast them. His opponent gains "Dispel Dice," which are used to counter successful spells. It is solid system, and players will find that wizards are neither overly influential (as in previous editions) nor ineffectual.

Those familiar with previous editions will be pleased to discover that heroes are not the combat gods they once were, and magic items are not all-powerful. The new *Warhammer* is much more about the units, formations, and troops, which is reflected by this edition's dark, brooding art style.

Overall, *Warhammer 6th Edition* is a solid release. As with all Games Workshop's recent games, it is expensive and requires much time. But, in the end, when you have two painted armies facing each other amidst a table of foam terrain, you can't help but enthusiastically reach for the dice.

-- J.C. Connors

Pyramid Pick

Monster Manual

Produced by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Designed by Monte Cook, Jonathan Tweet, and Skip Williams

224 full-color pages; $19.95

* * *

Pyramid Pick

Creature Collection

Produced by [Sword & Sorcery Studios](#) and [White Wolf Publishing, Inc.](#)

Written by Andrew Bates, Kraig Blackwelder, Carl Bowen, John Chambers, Trevor Chase, Ken Cliffe, Geoff Grabowski, Jess Heinig, Jeff Holt, Mike Lee, Ben Monk, James Stewart, Cynthia Summers, Richard Thomas, Mike Tinney, Jed Walls, Stephan Wieck and Stewart Wieck

224 b&w pages; $24.95

Things have been tight around the Shafer household recently. Money isn't exactly easy to come by, so adjustments have had to be made. One of those adjustments is that I am selling plasma . . . I am selling the contents of my blood for gaming money. So now I judge all of my purchases by one simple rule: Is this worth my blood? God help me if I buy any live action roleplaying stuff for *Vampire*.

So this past week I'm able to pick up two different collections of Creatures and Monsters for the new *D&D 3E/D20* system, and as God is my witness, I really don't know what to think.

The *Monster Manual* is the third and last core rulebook for *D&D Third Edition*. As with the other books in the series it is printed in full color, is extraordinarily well bound, and sells for the bargain price of $19.95.

The 224 page book hits the ground running by skipping a table of contents and instead opens with a huge alphabetical listing of all the creatures in the book. This list includes the various animals, vermin, and templates (which are in separate appendices), and pushes the number of monsters in the book to more than 500.

The next ten pages are spent in delineating and defining the various terms which are used in the *Monster Manual* itself. These entries are concisely written, and defined with a focus upon playability. Every monster is defined by the

same sets of terms: name, size, type, speed, attacks, damage, facing and reach, special abilities, special attacks, special qualities, abilities, skills, feats. There are also listings for secondary stats, which we will look at in a moment.

The type (aberration, plant, undead) is an aid in defining the creature, gives a set of basic saving throws, and hit points, as well as providing a path for the creature's own advancement. In this game you can have your basic run of the mill monster, which is what the *Monster Manual* primarily consists of, but there are also rules for making said monster truly advanced and monstrous. Speed is nicely done in that all types of movement are defined, along with an elegant system for defining just how well a creature flies. Facing and reach help to define just how big a monster is on a grid, and just how far it can reach. This really helps the miniatures gamers.

One of the things that I can remember about *AD&D 1st Edition* is the arguments regarding a creatures special attacks and defenses. Within these first few pages the various special abilities, attacks and qualities are defined. For instance the special abilities are grouped as to whether or not they are extraordinary, spell-like, or supernatural abilities. All of these have effects on play as to whether or not said abilities are vulnerable to anti-magic type spells, and how often they might be used. My description of how they work is inadequate to describe their elegance in play. The fact that monsters are given ability scores is a huge change from earlier versions of *D&D*; in fact, the *DMG* has tables with all kinds of suggested monstrous PC races. This continues the emphasis of *D&D 3E* on giving the players and DMs options, flexibility, and elegance. I especially enjoyed the explanations of the game effects if a monster lacked an ability. For instance, Golems lack constitution, which means they are immune to any effect that requires a fortitude saving throw, unless the effect also works on inanimate objects. Monsters also have some new feats, including the nicely done "Flyby attack." PCs had better be more respectful of flying monsters now.

The secondary stats include climate/terrain, organization, challenge rating, treasure, alignment, and advancement. The usage of a challenge rating is very interesting, and is a godsend for DMs trying to balance encounters for parties. A DM can take the average level of a party, and this group of PCs should be able to defeat an encounter of the same challenge rating . . . after taking some damage, but without casualties. The focus isn't as much upon experience points, as in previous editions, but upon challenging the players.

These monsters are beautiful, and there are 178 pages of them. Most monsters are nicely illustrated, though the statistics can sometimes be scattered from one page to the next. This happens because the book is so jam packed. Most of the monsters are the old favorites (like orcs and trolls), but there are some nice new additions (like shock lizards and howlers). Most of the old standby monsters have been redefined in *3E* terms, and they are very well done. The emphasis upon playability really helps with such argument-generating monsters like the Beholder. It feels luxurious to have all of those classic bones of contention defined.

The book closes with three appendices: animals, vermin, and templates. 12 pages may not seem like a lot of space, but it is absolutely packed with all kinds of animals PCs could encounter in their travels. There are six yucky pages devoted to disgusting vermin like spiders and scorpions. The final appendix is a series of templates, which can be applied to any of the monsters contained in the book. This allows a DM to create goblin ghosts, kobold weretigers, or troll half-dragons (to name a few). Each template tells how it will change the basic creature, and then concludes with an example. These rules give the GM even more flexibility in their creations, even if they do require a bit of thinkwork at times.

The book concludes with another listing of the monsters by challenge ratings, and this, again, is very useful for the harried GM. I've picked up some interesting ideas just by glancing at the list, and it has helped to pull me away from what I typically like to do . . . surprising PCs is always nice.

The *Monster Manual* as a whole really feels like *AD&D 1st Edition*. As in the 1st edition book, not every monster is illustrated, and sometimes the information for a particular creature is scattered over a couple of pages. However, unlike 1st edition, every game effect of a creature's ability is very well defined, and much easier to implement. The 2nd edition of AD&D organized things by placing each creature upon one or two pages, and had a nice illustration for every creature. A large amount of this space was taken up by a larger eyesight saving font size, and a lot of information about a creature's habitat, culture, or ecology. Most of this information is not in the new *3E Monster Manual* . . . it seems that this version concentrates upon the game, while allowing the DM to fill in any missing details.

Perhaps that's why the big lists of encounter tables are in the *DMG*. This is an essential reference book, and it is a bargain at $19.95.

The first book out for *AD&D* was the *Monster Manual*. It was sometime later that TSR released the infamous *Fiend Folio*. It seemed that everyone had an opinion about this book, and that opinion was either love or hate. In *D&D 3E*, ironically enough, the first book of monsters out was not the *Monster Manual*, but Sword & Sorcery Studios' (a cooperative venture uniting White Wolf and Necromancer Games) *Creature Collection*.

The *Creature Collection* is a 224 page book, that is copiously illustrated in black and white. It is hardbound, but nowhere near as sturdy as the *Monster Manual*. It retails for $24.95, and includes over 200 creatures within its covers. This book starts out with a nice table of contents, and continues with a one-page introduction to the Scarred Lands. Unlike the *Monster Manual*, which was intended to be more generic, this book of creatures is tied to a specific campaign setting. There is no listing at the front of the book describing and defining all of the terms used in the creature descriptions; therefore, I assume this book is meant to be used as an adjunct to the *Monster Manual*, and not a replacement for it. All of the special abilities and neat little fiddly bits are held within the individual creature descriptions, which can mean more work for the DM.

Although this book uses the *3E* statistics, including the Challenge Rating, the general layout of the book seems to be following *AD&D 2nd Edition*. Each creature is illustrated, and described upon a single page (or more as needed). This means that the font is larger, and more campaign specific material is included. Much of the geographic information just goes over my head, but the mythical, societal information does seem to be coming together in my mind.

Some of the creatures are variants of monsters in the *Monster Manual*, such as Brewer Gnomes or Steppe Trolls, but many of them are very original creations. These creations aren't just creatures, but some that are specifically built within this world. I don't see most campaigns using Drendari, Demigoddess of Shadow, and fitting in the Carnival of Shadows might be difficult . . . but rewarding. I am particularly enamored of a race of Ratmen, and a nice variant upon zombies, the Morgaunt.

This book concludes with two appendices: three pages describing the Gods of the Scarred Lands, and two pages containing both the Open Gaming License (OGL) and the D20 System License. Unfortunately the book does not conclude with a nice listing of the creatures by challenge level, or any cool templates. For that matter there aren't even any encounter tables, but I presume that these will be in the Scarred Lands book itself.

One of the notable elements of this book is that it was published under the OGL and D20 system License. Whoever heard of a company opening up this much of its system, and allowing another company to create product that could potentially conflict with their own?

As with the *Fiend Folio* I suspect that people are going to either love or hate this book. I have one player that will have fits with the Morgaunt, and he won't like that one bit. Some will want more monsters, others might wonder if the challenge ratings are balanced, and some might quibble with paying $5.00 more and getting around 300 less monsters. Still I feel that this is a very good book, and many if not most of these creatures can be placed into any DM's world with a minimal amount or work.

I am quite satisfied with both books, and feel that they are both worth my blood. One of these books you have to have (the *Monster Manual*), and the other you want to have (the *Creature Collection*). The *Monster Manual* is an essential reference work, that even the *Creature Collection* should be fully useful to a DM. Both are well-organized, with a definite bent toward playability. The *Creature Collection* has some very original creations, and it is fully compatible with *D&D 3E*. but if I had only enough money for one book I'd have to pick up the *Monster Manual*.

-- Scott Shafer

Appropriate Challenges? Hah!

Two weeks ago I tried to kill my players' characters.

This is not to be confused with the time I tried to kill my players with my delicious-but-deadly medium-rare Shake 'n' Bake Chicken.

No, in the last session I ran for *Aberrant*, I had a fairly standard scenario: A major NPC was being held hostage by a Bad Guy, and the Good Guys needed to swoop in, defeat the Bad Guy, rescue the NPC, and fly away to victory. But there was a *slight* snag in this:

I made the Bad Guy about 20 times more powerful than the Good Guys.

This was intentional; this is not like my first time running *GURPS Supers*, where I had an NPC casually toss a fireball and casually kill a PC, because I casually didn't have a freakin' clue about how deadly casual *GURPS* combat could be. No, I made this guy really powerful. And I *knew* there was a very real chance that the PCs would barge in, guns-a-blazin', and in one shot get killed.

Because I was fighting against what is (in my opinion) the Big Lie.

In the past I've joked with my players about *Dungeons & Dragons*:

Fighter: "Does anyone else find it odd that, when we all started out adventuring, we encountered some kobolds and goblins. And they were a challenge equal to us. Then a few months later we encountered those bugbears led by ogres. And they were tough, but we were a bit more experienced. Isn't it odd how we always face challenges of equal merit?"

Magician: "The same thing happened to my father, the Wizard Fizbin. He started out fighting gnolls. Last time he wrote, he was exploring something odd in a dungeon by a sleepy little hamlet; turns out it was a lich. He was pretty hurt."

Fighter: "All I'm saying is, if we'd encountered those beholders just a few months ago, we'd all be dead."

The Big Lie says that encounters will always be balanced for the players; encounters will be challenging for players, but if they're smart (and perhaps a bit lucky) they should prevail.

How unrealistic is *that*?

Admittedly, not all games are like that *per se*; *Shadowrun* is often built around the idea of sneaking into (and out of) a situation much too powerful for them to encounter directly, and *Call of Cthulhu* PCs are seldom in command of the situation.

But in general, it's rather assumed that GMs will develop challenges equal of the abilities of the players. I've never heard of, for example, first level characters being led to a dungeon with an adult red dragon in it. So, I ask myself -- Why?

It's certainly not realistic; In the real world, people often find themselves in situations that they cannot hope to control. People also find themselves in situations they can trivially prevail over.

I think the prevailing wisdom is that it's not fun to either stomp all over the opposition *or* to be trampled on. And there's a certain amount to be said for that; RPGs evolved out of the wargaming tradition, and most wargames and board games (and other games) are built around the idea of a fair challenge on both sides. But as a counterexample I point to the popularity of major league sports. Although the two sides are seldom equally suited, they're arguably often fun to watch *because* of that. It's exciting to watch the undermatched team struggle to hold its own against a powerful team (and occasionally prevail). And it's equally interesting to watch a powerful team you like overwhelm lesser

teams. (I'm a Florida State University alumni; I know of what I speak.)

Now as it turns out, in the adventure two weeks ago the Mega-Perceptive character took a turn to try to figure out who the Bad Guy was, and succeeded phenomenally; as such I was able to tell him the level of threat. As a result, they were able to rescue the NPC and flee, with only one of the two PCs being knocked to near-death (because he dodged).

In fairness, I've also had situations and encounters in the past where my PCs *greatly* outclassed the opposition. (In the **Vampire: The Dark Ages** game I ran, the Bad Guy anarch *knew* the PC was a vampire elder . . . he just didn't know *how* elder she was. It was brief. It wasn't pretty.)

Anyway, my point is, if players *know* everything they encounter will be challenging but surmountable, how exciting is that? On the other hand, if, with every encounter, they can't be sure whether they'll walk away from it alive, that makes each incident more potentially exciting and memorable. (Conversely, for those groups that have compunctions against killing or inappropriate uses of force, if it's made clear that there's a chance they may greatly overpower the opposition, the odds are greater they may avoid using lethal or excessive force until they know the nature of the threat.)

For the most part, I try to make my challenges equal to the characters. But that's by no means a given. And I certainly hope I make my adventures more memorable because of it.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Earthdawn Companion**, p. 152

(four stars) "Amendment XXXIII: Section 1. For all purposes of law, the definition of a human being is hereby amended to include only sentient creatures possessing or having once possessed forty-six chromosomes.
. . .
Section 3. This amendment was sponsored by New Providence™ Vacations and Resorts. Just Relax.™"

by Brian Reeves

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Keith Johnson

Using Cards

GURPS was designed to be a straightforward, "realistic" roleplaying game, where often the best choice in a combat situation is to avoid combat altogether. Players have a wide range of capabilities, and are encouraged to use ingenuity to stack the odds in their favor; however, when it finally comes down to a simple roll they are ultimately at the mercy of the dice. Having the ability as a player to push the odds in one's favor, especially for those oh-my-gosh-please-roll-a-one moments, can be a lifesaver.

GURPS Dramatic Card Play

Introducing cards to game play can be a simple and effective way to give players that lifesaver. Players draw and collect cards, each with a different effect, and may play these any time they see fit to briefly improve their odds. This can heighten drama and provide players with the sense of control, however tiny, over the cold odds of luck. Dramatic card play can always be useful, and may be especially appropriate for cinematic-style games.

The basic premise is simple: at the beginning of the game, each player draws three cards, which form their hand. Players may also spend one character point to draw three more cards -- either to replenish an empty hand or to increase the size of their own hand past the original three. GMs may (or may not) want to limit the maximum size of the hand, depending on the tone of the campaign and how many options they want the PCs to have. Each suit corresponds to a different character attribute: strength, dexterity, health, and intelligence. Players may only apply the effects of each card to its corresponding attribute (for example, a player with a 5 of cups cannot use that card for a Dexterity skill attempt).

Included are rules for using both standard card decks and exotic Tarot decks. The benefits and drawbacks of each are explained, followed by a breakdown of individual card abilities. It is suggested that Gamemasters allow trading of cards among players, but only in particularly dramatic scenes and when the characters are physically near one another.

Playing with a Standard Deck

While not as colorful and interesting as Tarot cards, the typical card deck, the one used for Poker and other common card games, is certainly more accessible. Many grocery stores sell decks of cards, often in a variety of styles (Bridge, Go Fish, etc.) and sometimes even with cartoon characters. Gamemasters may even already have several decks around

the house. Using a standard deck has more benefits, however, than being easy to find -- there are also fewer cards. The standard deck is derived from the Tarot, but the Minor Arcana (the suits, or all the cards from Ace to King) have changed slightly over the years and the Major Arcana has totally been dropped. That is, with the exception of The Fool, which has become the Joker card.

Playing without the Major Arcana does speed game play. Major Arcana cards have specific, individual effects, and players will need to consult a chart for a while to remember what each card permits. Without these special cards, abilities are limited to straight numeric benefits attributed to one of four suits (see below).

The Deck

As mentioned earlier, every "suit" corresponds to a *GURPS* character attribute: ST, IQ, DX, and HT. They break down as follows.

- **Clubs:** Clubs represents the attribute of Strength. All Clubs cards must be played for ST attribute or skill rolls.
- **Spades:** Spades represents the attribute of Dexterity. All Spades cards must be played for DX attribute or skill rolls.
- **Diamonds:** Diamonds represents the attribute of Intelligence. All Diamonds cards must be played for IQ attribute or skill rolls.
- **Hearts:** Hearts represents the attribute of Health. All Spades cards must be played for HT attribute or skill rolls.

All suits contain a range of numbered and "faced" cards ranging from Ace (representing the number one) to the King. In this case, standard number cards include the Ace card. The value of all number cards is used instead of a regular skill or attribute roll by adding the face value of the card to a roll of 1d. In other words, the number on the card takes the place of two dice out of three in a skill or attribute roll; the third die must still be rolled and added to the card value.

Example: Greg is attempting to roll a skill use for Stealth, with no penalties or bonuses. Ronen has a 10 Stealth skill. Greg possesses a 5 of Spades cards and decides to use it. The five on the card now counts as the sum of two of the three dice. Greg must roll the third and final die to determine the outcome. He does so, and rolls a 4, giving him a Stealth attempt of 9 (5 + roll of 4 = 9). He succeeds! If he had rolled a 6, the result would have been 11, greater than his Stealth, and he would have failed.

Obviously, players holding Ace cards and those of low number have a strong chance of succeeding most actions. The opposite holds true, though, of higher number cards -- a player with a 10 of Diamonds needs a 16 or higher in a mental skill or risk failure!

Face Cards

"Face" cards refer to all suited cards showing a character, which are the Jacks, Queens, and Kings. These cards work by temporarily adding points to the character's skill level. A player spending a face card may apply a bonus, but again, only to the attribute associated with the card's suit.

- **Jack:** All attribute or skill rolls are at +1 for one round.
- **Queen:** All attribute or skill rolls are at +2 for one round.
- **King:** All attribute or skill rolls are at +3 for one round.

The Joker: The Joker is a Wild Card; that is, players may use Joker cards to substitute any card in the deck. A player with a Joker card may use it as a 5 of Hearts, a Jack of Spades, or an Ace of Diamonds, etc. Some decks do not include a Joker; to be safe, Gamemasters wishing to incorporate the Joker should be sure to purchase a Poker deck.

Playing with the Tarot

Gamemasters looking for more atmosphere, and who are not overly superstitious, may find the use of a Tarot deck to be more atmospheric and dramatic than a standard card deck. The Tarot cards are used in a similar fashion -- three form a hand, and may be played for the corresponding attribute -- but bring added benefits with the Major Arcana. The drawback to Tarot use is that decks are much harder to find and can be expensive. A standard Rider-Waite deck, the most common Tarot set, can run anywhere from $10 at a chain bookstore to $40, $50, or more at a magic shop or spiritual bookstore. This added investment may compel Gamemasters to be overly sensitive about the condition of the cards in their deck. Another drawback is that, since the Major Arcana are used, players and gamemasters alike must memorize more effects (or have a chart handy). Tarot decks work especially well, though, with *In Nomine* campaigns and other games based on the supernatural or spiritual.

As with the standard deck, each suit corresponds to a *GURPS* attribute:

- **Wands:** Wands represents the attribute of Dexterity. All Wands cards must be played for DX attribute or skill rolls.
- **Cups:** Cups represents the attribute of Health. All Cups cards must be played for HT attribute or skill rolls.
- **Swords:** Swords represents the attribute of Strength. All Swords cards must be played for ST attribute or skill rolls.
- **Pentacles:** Pentacles represents the attribute of Intelligence. All Pentacles cards must be played for IQ attribute or skill rolls.

The Minor Arcana

The term "Minor Arcana" refers to all numbered cards and face cards of the suits Cups, Swords, Wands, or Pentacles, including Aces and Face cards. Numbered Minor Arcanum have a worth based upon face value of the card, which may be used instead of a regular skill or attribute roll by adding the face value of the card to a roll of 1d. Aces have a face value of 1.

Example: Michelle has the 4 of Wands card in her hand, and is attempting to roll Acrobatics, which she has at skill level 8. She plays the card and rolls 1d, getting a 3. These add to 7 (Wands 4 + roll of 3), providing a successful result. If she rolled a 5, the result would have been above her skill, and she would have failed.

Minor Arcana face cards provide temporary (one round) bonuses as per following:

- **Page:** Attribute or skill is at +1.
- **Knight:** Attribute or skill is at +2.
- **Queen:** Attribute or skill is at +3.
- **King:** Negates the default penalty for one skill which the character does not possess.

The Major Arcana

"Major Arcana" are those cards which do not fall into a suit, and have an individual name (such as Heirophant, Magician, Tower, and Fool). Each of these cards has a special application which may or may not directly affect an attribute or skill roll. There are 22 of these cards, and each has a different effect -- these effects are listed below. The numbers for each card, located on the face of the card itself, are given for ease of reference. Following each title is a one-word description of the card's representation, as one might hear in a fortune reading, and this is followed by the card's application. Major Arcana are unsuited; that is, they have no connection to a specific attribute, and so may be played for any attribute or skill.

0.	**The Fool:** *Folly.*	Provides +1 bonus to any skill that carries the risk of immediate drastic results upon failure.
I.	**The Magician:** *Diplomacy.*	Adds +1 to any skill used to persuade or convince another.
II.	**The High Priestess:**	Provides +1 to skill used to extract information from an intelligent subject.

	Mystery.	
III.	**The Empress:** *Action.*	Adds 1 point to Passive Defense for one round.
IV.	**The Emporer:** *Protection.*	Adds 1 point to Damage Resistance for one round.
V.	**Heirophant:** *Alliance.*	Provides +1 each for two or more characters performing the same action simultaneously.
VI.	**The Lovers:** *Attraction.*	Adds +1 to any Reaction roll.
VII.	**The Chariot:** *Providence.*	Any one action taken to rescue or prevent harm to another character is at +1.
VIII.	**Strength:** *Courage.*	Player may roll one Will roll or Fright check at +1.
IX.	**The Hermit:** *Treason.*	Provides +1 to any skill used to conceal an item or person from discovery.
X.	**Wheel of Fortune:** *Destiny.*	Allows character to take first action in combat round sequence.
XI.	**Justice:** *Equity.*	All players may refill their hands to equal the person with the most cards.
XII.	**The Hanged Man:** *Wisdom.*	Player may ask gamemaster one yes-or-no question and receive a truthful answer.
XIII.	**Death:** *Mortality.*	Allows a critically injured character to void one HT roll for death.
XIV.	**Temperance:** *Frugality.*	Player may retain one card after spending it.
XV.	**The Devil:** *Violence.*	Adds an extra die of damage to an attack roll.
XVI.	**The Tower:** *Calamity.*	Allows character second attempt for failed action at -3.
XVII.	**The Star:** *Privation.*	Adds +1 to any skill used for purposes of theft.
XVIII.	**The Moon:** *Hidden Enemies.*	Provides +1 to skill attempt to discover hidden objects or adversaries.
XIX.	**The Sun:** *Fortune.*	Player may roll four dice and choose best three for one action.
XX.	**Judgement:** *Renewal.*	Player may refill hand (not exceeding beginning maximum).
XXI.	**The World:** *Voyage.*	Character's Move score at +1 for one round.

Note: Some Tarot decks may contain a blank card which gamemasters may wish to incorporate as a wild card.

Conclusion

The use of cards in game play does not need to be confined to the players. Gamemasters may elect to hold a hand of their own, to be used as an "NPC hand" from which any non-player character, good or evil, may play. A system might also be devised by which one card is flipped every round, changing the flow of the action (perhaps using a standard card deck to determine initiative, morale, luck, or other changing fortunes of combat). The most important consideration, though, is whether card use is enhancing the game. It should never be allowed to destroy the flow of an adventure or to add fuel to already over-powerful characters. As with any rule, if it isn't fun, don't allow it!

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Letters of Marque: Starship Deckplans
Letters of Marque 2: Troopship Deckplans
(for Noble Armada/Fading Suns)

Published by [Holistic Design](#)

Designed by Chris & Tracy Wiese

Ten 17" x 22" maps + Noble Armada Ship Display sheet (Letters of Marque), Nine 17" x 22" maps (Letters of Marque 2); $14.95 each

In my mind, there's no better way to truly understand that you're living in a tin can in space than to have a map of that tin can. When you realize that your living quarters are about a hundred square feet, and you're sharing a room with two other marines, you begin to *really* appreciate the mess hall. It's the room with a luxurious six chairs *and* a table.

Letters of Marque and *Letters of Marque 2* contain ships that are designed for the *Noble Armada* miniatures game, which is set in the *Fading Suns* universe. But they are also "approved for use with *Traveller*" and should be useful for many science fiction games where 25mm-scale maps of ships might come into play. I bought them because of my interest in the *Fading Suns RPG*.

Letters of Marque: Starship Deckplans has five ships. The al-Malik *Odyssey* class explorer is a small ship designed for a small crew . . . about what you would expect a mid-level band of PCs to acquire. The Merchant League *Sentry* class escort is slightly bigger, and would be suitable for 10-12 crew and passengers to travel in comfort (I'm guessing; see below). Two of *Fading Suns*'s competing noble houses, the regal Hawkwoods and the untrustworthy Decados, are represented by two large frigates (each is represented by two 17" x 22" maps). And finally there is a gargantuan Luxury Liner, which is four decks deep and consists of four 17" by 22" maps.

Letters of Marque 2 consists of four ships. There is the torpedo-like Hazat *Stalker* class explorer, again suitable for a standard crew of heroes. The even-longer Hazat *Scorpion* class frigate, which consists of two 17" x 22" maps, immediately evokes images of broadsides and boarding parties (though whether this ship would be the boarder or the boarded is debatable). And, again, the factions of the Decados and Hawkwoods are represented by two galliots, gigantic troop-carrying ships that take up three 17" x 22" maps (two maps for one level and one map for the other).

These maps are exceptionally well done and logical, and they are all very believable; as you wander a miniature down the corridors, it's easy to think this is how they *really* exist. Each faction also has its own style and architecture; from the boxy-but-good Hawkwood vessels to the angular Klingon-like features of the Decados ships to the sweeping curved shapes of the Al-Malik, you really get a sense of the cultural differences. Of course these ships all have bridges, and gunnery stations, and engineering sections, but that's not all. There are bathrooms, and showers, and mess halls, and everything else that makes shipboard life "real." For campaigns where shipboard interactions or daily routines are important, these deckplans can be a real boon. Each ship also contains a more standard "art" drawing, which is useful for understanding what the thing would look like.

These maps are also somewhat useful for generating adventure ideas. What can be in the concealed closet in the noble's chambers? What happens when the back half of the ship explodes and the airlock seals? What if the PCs needed to sneak aboard a galliot?

But these maps do have some problems. First off they are *only* maps; all game-specific information is located in the *Fading Suns* books, including some seemingly universal information (the number of crew and passengers the ship can hold, for example). At least *Letters of Marque 2* offers some details like suggested color schemes of the ships. These maps are also very unwieldy; unless you were planning on having a miniatures battle or specific encounter aboard a ship, most of these are too large for a GM to use in a game without significant troubles or photocopy reduction. (One deck of the Luxury Liner fully laid out is over four feet long!) I'm also not sure how useful some of these ships would be for non-miniatures battles; how often do you *really* need to know where the marines from a frigate are streaming out?

And, finally, there is the issue of cost. No matter how much I enjoyed these maps, my mind was still screaming at me, "It's $14.95 for four (or five) ships!" While this would have been a trivial purchase for me if it were, say, a 32-page book of 16 deckplans (at a reduced size for photocopy enlargement), it's much less so when I'm only getting four ships. If I don't *need* frigates in my campaign, then two of the five ships from the first collection are useless. The reduced number of ships also means that there are some glaring omissions. The Li Halan, for example, are not represented, nor are any of the church ships of the *Fading Suns* universe; of course, this isn't a problem for folks using these plans for non-*Fading Suns* games. Finally I feel I should point out that, for those who would want a complete set of deckplans, you'd need to pick up *Noble Armada*, since it contains other plans, like the Decados Stealth Ship.

All told, I'm afraid that, despite the quality of these deckplans, I can't really recommend these volumes unless someone has a compelling need for them (or they routinely roll around naked in money) . . . in which case they are wonderful. Of the two of them, I would probably recommend the first set more, since it contains two smaller ships that would likely be of interest to PCs, and the Luxury Liner, which immediately evoked many adventure ideas in me.

In the meantime, I'm going to look out the porthole in our tin can . . . *if* I can squeeze by the gunners.

-- Steven Marsh

The Strange Death of Mr. Edgar A. Poe

"In that which I now propose, we will discard the interior points of this tragedy, and concentrate our attention upon its outskirts. Not the least usual error in investigations such as this is the limiting of inquiry to the immediate, with total disregard of the collateral or circumstantial events. It is the malpractice of the courts to confine evidence and discussion to the bounds of apparent relevancy. Yet experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger, portion of truth arises from the seemingly irrelevant."
-- C. Auguste Dupin, in "The Mystery of Marie Roget," by Edgar Allan Poe

It's one of the cheap ironies of history that literary history is especially full of cheap ironies. The man who invented the detective story, Edgar Allan Poe, died of unknown causes in the city of his birth after almost completely disappearing from human sight for a week. When you combine the evocative power of Poe with the dangerous romance of antebellum America, stir in fiendish conspiracies and Missing Time, you hardly need laudanum to conjure up horrific visions indeed. Drink deep with me, then, of this heady cocktail, of the mysterious death of Edgar Allan Poe.

"We regret to learn that Edgar A. Poe, the distinguished American poet, scholar and critic, died in this city yesterday morning, after an illness of four or five days. This announcement, coming so sudden and unexpected, will cause poignant regret among all who admire genius, and have sympathies for the frailties too often attending it."
-- death-notice of Edgar Allan Poe, Baltimore *Sun*, Oct. 8, 1849

On September 26, 1849, the forty year old Edgar A. Poe, the most famous literary figure in America, bid farewell to his childhood sweetheart Elmira Shelton in Richmond, Virginia. His plan was to take a steamer to Baltimore, then transfer to the train to Philadelphia. He would spend one or two days in Philadelphia performing a discreetly lucrative ghostwriting assignment, then move on to New York, where he would collect his belongings and his mother-in-law Mrs. Clemm. Poe would then return to Richmond in triumph to marry the wealthy widow Shelton, and relaunch his career and American letters. That, at least, was the intention. Where, exactly, he departed from the plan may never be known; Poe reappears in the world of eyewitness documentation in Baltimore on October 3, apparently sunk deep in inebriated stupor and wearing shabby clothing obviously not his own. One Joseph Walker discovered Poe in Ryan's Tavern, and sent a note to Poe's friend Snodgrass summoning him to the scene. Snodgrass, and a cousin of Poe's named Herring, took him to the hospital. Poe raved in delirium, and when briefly lucid was unable (or unwilling) to say where he had been, or what had become of his clothing and luggage. He died on October 7, 1849, with the medical verdict being exposure compounded by alcoholic posioning. No autopsy was performed, and he was buried the next day in Baltimore.

Poe was not, as it turns out, a consistent alcoholic, being subject only to widely-separated (though devastating) binges. He had, in fact, recently joined the Temperance Society in Richmond, and later testimony (contradicting immediate reports) denied that he smelled of alcohol at all. Partially as a reaction to the jealous slanders of one Rufus Griswold, who painted Poe as a drooling drunkard and drug-fiend, Poe's latter-day defenders attempt to discern other causes for his death. Theorists have postulated a weak heart, epilepsy, diabetic coma, severe hypoglycemia, toxic shock syndrome, cerebral meningitis, and most recently, rabies.

"Poe's condition could easily have been the result of intracerebral trauma, and his lucid interval, if Moran's story can be relied upon, would even lend support to the diagnosis of epidural hematoma."
-- John F. Courtney, "Addiction and Edgar Allan Poe," *Resident and Staff Physician* (Jan, 1971)

At least one physician has determined (well after the fact) that a cerebral hemorrhage could account for Poe's symptoms, assuming for the moment that the contemporary testimony of Poe's "reek of alcohol" is ignored. In 1872, editor R.H. Stoddard combined the two theses, postulating (on rather circumstantial evidence) that Poe had been kidnapped off the street and imprisoned ("cooped") by political-party thugs, who had plied him with whiskey and drugs to commit vote fraud. After squiring him around to "eleven separate" balloting places, they abandoned him at Ryan's Tavern (the fourth-ward polling place) to die. Although this practice was common in nineteenth-century urban America, and although October 3 was the date of a state-house election, further research in the papers indicates that there was almost no "cooping" reported from Baltimore that year. In *Midnight Dreary: The Mysterious Death of Edgar*

Allan Poe, John Evangelist Walsh theorizes (based more soundly on allusive hints and rumors in contemporary letters) that Elmira Shelton's brothers, staunchly opposed to their sister's marriage to the alcoholic, womanizing, generally depraved, and (most importantly) impoverished Edgar Poe, set upon him in Baltimore and either beat him up or forced whiskey upon him, counting on Poe's own debauched behavior to either finish the job or humiliate him so publicly that the engagement would be cancelled.

"He laughed and threw the bottle up-wards with a gesticulation I did not understand. I looked at him in surprise. He repeated the movement -- a grotesque one. 'You do not comprehend?' he said. 'Not I,' I replied. 'Then you are not of the brotherhood.' 'How?' 'You are not of the masons.' 'Yes, yes,' I said, 'yes! yes.' 'You? Impossible! A mason?' 'A mason,' I replied. 'A sign,' he said. 'It is this,' I answered, producing a trowel from beneath the folds of my roquelaire. 'You jest,' he exclaimed, recoiling a few paces. 'But let us proceed to the Amontillado.'"
-- Edgar Allan Poe, "A Cask of Amontillado"

Certain other details give credence to Walsh's theories. Either in July or late September of 1849, Poe burst in upon his friend, the Philadelphia engraver John Sartain, in (as his 1877 biographer William Gill records) "dread of some fearful conspiracy against his life." Poe's first words to Sartain are evocative, and beautifully vague: "Mr. Sartain, I have come to you for protection and a refuge. It will be difficult for you to believe what I have to tell -- that such things could be in this nineteenth century. It is necessary that I remain concealed for a time." According to Sartain's somewhat confused later testimony, while on the train to New York Poe overheard (thanks to his "marvelous powers of hearing"-- shades of Roderick Usher!) a trio of villains plotting to kill him. He eluded them at Bordentown, New Jersey, and with the help of Sartain (and apparently another friend, the author George Lippard) he laid low and left Philadelphia in disguise after clipping off his mustache.

The "three conspirators" combined with the rumored allusions to "brothers" who sought revenge on Poe can be spun in a widening gyre by the properly Illuminated GM. Poe was a dedicated anti-Mason, openly incorporating savage parody of their rituals and secrecies in such stories as "A Cask of Amontillado," "The Devil in the Belfry," and "Never Bet the Devil Your Head." (Satanist Freemasons, one imagines, would be doubly irritated by the latter two of these.) In the latter story, a man is beheaded under a covered bridge, sparking echoes from the Masonic-Templar Baphomet and the bridge-symbolism so prevalent in some Scotch Rite degrees. (Interestingly, a bizarrely runaway train smashed his gravestone while it was still in the stonemason's yard.) Could Poe's other stories, of codes, and robed inquisitors, and bizarre lineages, and fiendish murder have also hidden references to some arch-conspiratorial plot of black magicians in antebellum New York? (Marc Olsen uses this theory to lurid ends in his shocker novel *Poe Must Die*.) What secrets had the investigative journalist and father of detective fiction uncovered that They would kill to protect?

"When I returned I found him in a violent delirium, resisting the efforts of two nurses to keep him in bed. This state continued until Saturday evening (he was admitted on Wednesday) when he commenced calling for one 'Reynolds,' which he did through the night up to three on Sunday morning."
-- letter of Poe's attending physician, Dr. John J. Moran, to Mrs. Clemm, Nov. 15, 1849

In 1885, one George Rollins came forward to identify himself as the train conductor on Poe's final rail voyage from Philadelphia to Baltimore. He describes the figures shadowing Poe (apparently Sartain's help had only temporarily distracted them), saying they looked like "sharks." What if, rather than colorful nineteenth-century metaphor, Rollins' description were the literal truth? Would Poe's literary heir (who, like Poe, received detailed inspiration from dreams) H.P. Lovecraft have recognized them as akin to the Deep Ones of Innsmouth? Would this explain why Joseph Walker, whose peculiarly reticent and tentative note almost saved Poe's life, was found drowned in Baltimore's Spring Gardens, despite being a good swimmer? Would it, somehow, connect to the mysterious figures who appeared to Poe during his July incarceration in Philadelphia's Moyamensing Prison; a radiant woman in white and a "cauldron of boiling liquid"? What Dark Grail did Poe sip from to send him nearly to suicide upon his release?

In this connection, his final call for "Reynolds" takes on added interest: Poe knew, as far as can be told, nobody named Reynolds -- but maintained a compelling interest in the journalism of one Jeremiah Reynolds, whose incessant campaigns on behalf of the Hollow Earth sparked the Wilkes Antarctic Expedition in 1838. In fact, Reynolds' work became a model for "The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym," in which an Antarctic Expedition meets an unnamed doom at the hands of a mysterious white figure. During his last week, had Poe managed to communicate with

Reynolds and discover the ultimate truth behind the conspiracy, a truth that led to the deep, dark waters of the Antarctic Ocean? Between Elder technology and GM intervention, Poe's last week could have taken months of extra-temporal experience on the astral plane or in the misty realms of sub-history. After seeing the edge of the gulf for himself, perhaps using opium or some rarer substance, did he revisit the Lady of the Cauldron for guidance? Did he die, perhaps raving "Tekeli-li!" in seeming delirium, to preserve a secret Man Was Not Meant to Ratiocinate? Only the Antarctic Rite Mason Shark-People (and of course the GM) know for sure.

The X Fools

by Doc Cross

Art by Phil Foglio and Colored by Keith Johnson

Greetings, fellow *Toon*sters! In the never-ending quest to find new sources of material to fine *Toon*, we hereby present to you our version of the X Files cast along with a few adventure seeds. Use them in your *Toon* games in any way you see fit and remember . . . The Spoof Is Out There.

Fax Muledeer

Muledeer is a six-foot-tall humanoid deer. He has short antlers and a rather large nose. He usually wears dark suits. Fax is the TBI (Toony Bureau of Investigation) agent in charge of the X Files. X Files cases involve strange, unexplainable and paranormal events. Fax is the perfect person to investigate these cases, because ever since his sister was abducted by aliens he believes in all of that kind of stuff. Aliens, monsters, spontaneous human combustion, worldwide conspiracies, psychic powers, mind-controlling roleplaying games about cartoon characters . . . Fax is sure they all exist. In fact, his superiors at the TBI put him on the X Files just to shut him up. It didn't work very well.

Fax lives in a small apartment and has few friends. In fact, he is a bit of a nerd when he's not actually investigating a case. About the only people he ever hangs around with are the Lone Punmen, and they are so geeky that even other geeks avoid them. Fax does seem to like his partner, Dana Screwy, but it has never ocurred to him to ask her out on a date.

Agent Muledeer always carries a gun, a cell phone that works *anywhere* under *any* circumstances, and a copy of the *Audabomb Guide to Aliens & Monsters* in his back pocket. His Natural Enemies are Worldwide Conspiracies, Aliens, Mutants and Monsters.

Beliefs and Goals: Strange paranormal events *do* happen. (Note: Yes they do, but this is *Toon*, so most characters will hardly notice them.) There *are* monsters and mutants out there. (Note: See previous note.) Aliens *do* visit out planet and they kidnapped my sister, Samantha. (Note: His sister was *not* kidnapped by aliens. She actually just changed her name and went to live with the family down the street to get away from her nutty brother.) A powerful conspiracy that reaches to the uppermost levels of world governments is keeping all of this secret. (Note: The conspiracy *does* exist, but they aren't much of a secret. They are listed in the yellow pages of the phone book under "Worldwide Conspiracies.") I will find out what happened to my sister and expose the conspiracy. (Note: Yeah, right.) Along the way, maybe I can get my partner, Screwy, to believe that these things are real. (Note: Never gonna happen.)

Hit Points: 10
Speed: 5

Muscle: 5
  Break Down Door: 6

Climb: 6
    Fight: 7
    Pick Up Heavy Thing: 5
    Throw: 6

Zip: 6
    Dodge: 7
    Drive Vehicle: 8
    Fire Gun: 9
    Jump: 6
    Ride: 6
    Run: 8
    Swim: 6

Smarts: 8
    Hide/Spot Hidden: 10
    Identify Dangerous Thing: 9
    Read: 10
    Resist Fast-Talk: 9
    See/Hear/Smell: 9
    Set/Disarm Trap: 8
    Track/Cover Tracks: 9

Chutzpah: 7
    Fast-Talk: 9
    Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 7
    Sleight of Hand: 7
    Sneak: 9

Shticks:
    Know Obscure Fact: 10
    Talk To Monsters: 5

Dana Screwy

Agent Screwy is just about the complete opposite of Agent Muledeer. She refuses to believe in *anything* strange or paranormal, even if she sees it. Dana will always try to find the logical scientific reason why something happens. If she ever *is* present when something totally weird happens, her Incredibly Bad Luck will kick in and she will be knocked unconcious, boggled, blinded or otherwise made unable to witness any proof of what Muledeer has tried to show her. Muledeer, on the other hand, sees strange beings and events all the time.

Dana Screwy is a doctor and a scientist. She was put on the X Files to prove that Muldeer is crazy (What? Crazy *Toon* characters? No way!), but she keeps wanting to believe that he might be onto something. She thinks they might have a logical explanation, although she has no clue what it might be. She DOES believe in the Conspiracy, but she thinks that it is mostly involved in mundane things like making VCRs impossible to program and feeding kids mystery meat in school cafeterias.

Agent Screwy has red hair and dresses in dark suits, like most other TBI agents do. At 5 feet tall, this humanoid squirrel doesn't look tough, but she is. She always carries a gun, a cell phone just like Muledeer has, and an evidence collection kit in her back Pocket. Her Natural Enemies are Worldwide Conspiracies and Male Chauvinists.

Beliefs and Goals: Muledeer *can't* be right, but there are unexplained things going on. All I need to do is find the scientific explanation and everything will be okay. There is a conspiracy out there and I'll help Muledeer expose it. I don't take any guff from macho men. I'm going to try to help Muledeer be less of a dork.

Hit Points: 9
Speed: 5

Muscle: 4
  Break Down Door: 4
  Climb: 6
  Fight: 7
  Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4
  Throw: 7

Zip: 6
  Dodge: 8
  Drive Vehicle: 9
  Fire Gun: 11
  Jump: 5
  Ride: 7
  Run: 7
  Swim: 7

Smarts: 10
  Hide/Spot Hidden: 10
  Identify Dangerous Thing: 11 (5 if it is an alien dangerous thing)
  Read: 10
  Resist Fast-Talk: 11
  See/Hear/Smell: 10
  Set/Disarm Trap: 10
  Track/Cover Tracks: 11

Chutzpah: 6
  Fast-Talk: 7
  Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 9
  Sleight of Hand: 7
  Sneak: 9

Shticks:
  Incredibly Bad Luck: 11

Assistant Director Skinny

Walter Skinny is an Assistant Director of the TBI and Muledeer and Screwy's boss. He knows all about the worldwide conspiracy and doesn't like the fact that they force him to help cover things up. He tries to get Muledeer and Screwy to not investigate things the conspiracy is involved in, but they do it anyway. Skinny actually does believe in some of the weird things Muledeer investigates, but he won't risk his career on things that have no hard proof. Except hair-growing tonics.

Assistant Director Skinny is a 6-foot, 4-inch tall humanoid cat with a bald head and glasses. He usually wears the official TBI dark suit, but without the jacket. Skinny is pretty strong and can kick some butt if he gets mad. His Natural Enemies are Worldwide Conspiracies and people who call him "Baldy." He carries a gun, a TBI rules and regulations book and a bottle of hair growing tonic in his Back Pocket.

Beliefs and Goals: Muledeer and Screwy need to follow the rules, even if they are onto something paranormal. Try to convince them not to oppose the conspiracy. If you can't do that, then at least try to keep the conspiracy from making them Fall Down. Mess up conspiracy plans if you get the chance. Keep trying hair growth tonics. One of them *has* to

work.

Hit Points: 12
Speed: 6

Muscle: 8
  Break Down Door: 9
  Climb: 8
  Fight: 10
  Pick Up Heavy Thing: 8
  Throw: 9

Zip: 6
  Dodge: 9
  Drive Vehicle: 7
  Fire Gun: 8
  Jump: 8
  Ride: 6
  Run: 9
  Swim: 7

Smarts: 7
  Hide/Spot Hidden: 8
  Identify Dangerous Thing: 9
  Read: 9
  Resist Fast-Talk: 11
  See/Hear/Smell: 8
  Set/Disarm Trap: 8
  Track/Cover Tracks: 8

Chutzpah: 8
  Fast-Talk: 8
  Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 8
  Sleight of Hand: 8
  Sneak: 8

Shticks:
  Incredible Luck: 6

The Bubblegum Chewing Man

This guy is the head honcho of the worldwide conspiracy. Called BCM for short, he is responsible for all of the secret projects and alien collaborations that Muledeer and Screwy stumble upon. He always manages to cover things up before the agents can expose things. BCM knows what happened to Muledeer's sister, as well as other big secrets like what really happened at Roswell and why hot dogs come 10 to a pack but hotdog buns come 8 to a pack.

BCM is a 5-foot, 10-inch human with dark hair and a wrinkled face that almost never shows any emotion. He speaks in a very calm, but tired sounding voice. BCM contantly chews bubblegum and blows bubbles in people's faces. This guy is very dangerous and will not hesitate to drop an anvil on the head of anybody that gets in his way. He carries a gun, a stick of dynamite and a five-pound bag of bubblegum in his Back Pocket. His Natural Enemies are Everybody.

Beliefs and Goals: Nothing must stop the conspiracy from achieving its goals, whatever they are. I can never quite remember. Make sure that Muledeer and Screwy never can prove anything. If anyone gets in my way, I'll make them Fall Down. Always carry plenty of bubblegum.

Hit Points: 11
Speed: 4

The X Fools

Muscle: 4
  Break Down Door: 5
  Climb: 4
  Fight: 5
  Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4
  Throw: 5

Zip: 4
  Dodge: 6
  Drive Vehicle: 9
  Fire Gun: 9
  Jump: 5
  Ride: 4
  Run: 5
  Swim: 6

Smarts: 9
  Hide/Spot Hidden: 11
  Identify Dangerous Thing: 11
  Read: 10
  Resist Fast-Talk: 11
  See/Hear/Smell: 9
  Set/Disarm Trap: 9
  Track/Cover Tracks: 9

Chutzpah: 9
  Fast-Talk: 9
  Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 9
  Sleight of Hand: 10
  Sneak: 11

Shticks:
  Maximum Boggle: 9
  Change Shape: 7
  Incredible Luck: 10

The Lone Punmen

The Lone Punmen are three guys who spend all of their waking hours investigating conspiracies and writing about them in a newsletter and on the internet. They are also pretty interested in anything paranormal, so naturally they are friends of Muledeers. If Muledeer or Screwy have a question about something strange or need a piece of evidence analyzed, they will come to the Lone Punmen.

The Punmen don't seem to do much besides hang around their secret headquarters talking about conspiracy theories and goofing around on the internet. Once in awhile they play roleplaying games like *Dungeons & Toons* or *Mektoon*. They are all terribly geeky and try to flirt with Agent Screwy every time they see her. Their Natural Enemies are Worldwide Conspiracies, Cool People and Monsters Who Eat Nerds. They carry anything the Animator thinks is funny in their Back Pockets.

The Lone Punmen are Shmohicky (a short humanoid frog), Gangly (a tall skinny humanoid dog), and Fryers (a tall

file:///D|/To%20Update%20Torrents/GURPs%20to%20OCR/pyramid_2000/2000/1025.1.html[11/12/2008 08:33:03]

humanoid chicken).

Beliefs and Goals: Conspiracies are everywhere! The truth must be told, even though everyone thinks we are crazy. Help Muledeer and Screwy whenever possible. Dana Screwy is a fab babe! We should try to remember to get lives someday.

Hit Points: 7
Speed: 4

Muscle: 3
  Break Down Door: 3
  Climb: 4
  Fight: 3
  Pick Up Heavy Thing: 4
  Throw: 3

Zip: 4
  Dodge: 4
  Drive Vehicle: 6
  Fire Gun: 4
  Jump: 5
  Ride: 4
  Run: 5
  Swim: 5

Smarts: 9
  Hide/Spot Hidden: 9
  Identify Dangerous Thing: 11
  Read: 11
  Resist Fast-Talk: 10 (2 versus good looking women)
  See/Hear/Smell: 9
  Set/Disarm Trap: 9
  Track/Cover Tracks: 9

Chutzpah: 4
  Fast-Talk: 4
  Pass/Detect Shoddy Goods: 6
  Sleight of Hand: 4
  Sneak: 4

Shticks:
  Know Obscure Fact: 11
  Weird Science: 10
  Contacts & Informants On The Internet: 9

X Fools Adventure Seeds

- *Unnatural Selection:* Screwy and Muledeer (and any other PCs) investigate what appears to be the work of a serial boggler, but soon find out that the main suspect might be evolving into a new life form: an Animator!
- *Pie In The Sky:* Muledeer is convinced that a UFO has landed in a small town in Oregon, but none of the inhabitants will admit to seeing anything strange even though aliens are walking all around the town! Naturally, Muledeer is the only one who can see them. Is the Conspiracy connected to this? Will Screwy try to sedate Muledeer so he can get some rest?
- *Squeezed:* In this one, somebody is getting into buildings through some *very* small openings. Once inside, the

crazed maniac (whose name is Eugene Toons) makes people Fall Down and then eats their hair. Can the agents capture him, or will he squeeze through their hands?

- *Where Wolf?:* A hairy howling creature is making people Fall Down (in several pieces) in Hollyweird. Muledeer and Screwy head for Tinseltown to stop it. Is it really a werewolf, or just another ***Toon*** character who has gone to the dogs? Time for Our Heroes to get out the good silver.
- *Alien/Aliout:* This adventure puts Muledeer and Screwy hot on the trail of the BCM and his alien buddies as they try to replace all the hotel doormen in New Pork City with alien clones. Would anyone in New Pork really care? Probably not, but Screwy and Muledeer will try to stop them anyway.
- *Jackalopus Illuminatus:* While helping the Secret Service loot and pillage the offices of a Texas game publisher, Muledeer becomes convinced that the companies president is really a mythical creature called a jackalope. Worse than that, Screwy finds evidence that the company is merely a front for the Worldwide Conspiracy. Featuring guest starring roles for Steve Jackalope, Steven Marshmallow, Duck Cross, David Pulverizer and Sean "Dr. Krime" Punched.
- *Have You Ever Had The Feeling You Were Being Sasquatched?:* During the investigation of mysterious disappearences at a remote forest research project, Screwy discovers some size 47 EEEEEE footpronts. Muledeer thinks it might be Bigfoot and he sets a trap using huge red sneakers. Screwy buys several cases of foot powder.
- *How Kenny Possibly Survive That?:* In a small and very strange town in Colorado, the agents investigate the case of an 8-year-old boy who Falls Down once a week, only to return to life in perfect health the next day. Will the local police officer help Screwy and Muledeer, or will he just call them "looky loos?" Will the local cafeteria cook want to make sweet love to Screwy? And who or what is leaving those smelly brown spots all over?

by Jonathan Souza

Art by andi jones and Colored by Keith Johnson

This *GURPS Black Ops* adventure is for a team of black ops, about four to six. They should have a good range of Science skills. However, *none* of the members can be psi-ops, as this would ruin a good portion of the adventure's plot and feasibility.

Heading To the Bottom of the World

The team is literally taken from whatever they're doing and shoved onto a tilt-rotor transport run by the Company. As they're flown into wherever they're going, the players should note that there is a CD player and CD on the deck. If they play the CD, a message is there for them from the Company.

> Greetings. Sorry about the short notice, but you're the only team we could get for this job and you're up for a big one. A research team in Antarctica has discovered what could be brainsucker worms in the ice. From what we know, the worms they have found so far are dead, but we can't take any chances of them finding live worms or dissecting the dead ones and revealing that they didn't come from this planet. Your job is very simple -- get down there, find out what they found, and deal with it, using extreme measures if necessary. As far as the team knows, you're coming down from UCLA to help analyze the discovery.
>
> There are two major problems. The first is that there is a big storm coming through the area. As of noon tomorrow, local time, nothing can fly in or out. Trying to go overland to any facility would be a slow form of suicide, so you're stuck there for the next few days. The second is that the clock is ticking; if they have found brainsuckers, they have to be Cocktailed and the evidence destroyed in six days; otherwise the only way to keep a lid on this is to kill everyone there. You now have dossiers on the people there, as well as your equipment. Good luck.

The CD destroys itself as it plays (mostly due to an overpowered laser in the CD player), and the team can sort through their equipment. What they have is the following:

- TL8 Cold weather survival gear, enough for every member of the team. It resembles the commercial, TL7 gear but allows for unaffected survival at -90 degrees F (TL7 gear will only protect up to -50 degrees F). The suits are also armored; treat as a full-body suit of heavy monocrys.

- Enough pistols (Glock 17 w/laser sight and barrel mods for silencers), clips of both subsonic and standard ammo to give each player four clips of each, and silencers for the whole team.
- Enough flame-throwers to give the team one flame-thrower per two members, plus one extra.
- Enough HAFLAs to give each team member two packs.
- TL8 biology science equipment; this gives a Science Op a +2 to any medical or biology rolls. As well, it allows for a link-up via Cistron to the Blacknet for access to more information.
- Assorted equipment of the player's preference, up to 50 kg per player.
- Enough survival rations and stored food to last two weeks.
- Enough doses of the Cocktail to handle 30 people.

By the team arrives at site (in six hours, after two mid-air refuelings), they should have a good idea of what their cover identities are and the four person team of scientists and the three-man caretaker staff of the camp are like.

The camp is called (with some odd optimism) Camp Sunny Days. Billed as one of the new "clean Antarctica" facilities, it resembles a cross with domes at each end of the cross's short arms, and a central dome. One of the arms is the living quarters for the camp members; these are set up dormitory-style, with each person having a room and a shower, with access to a central living and eating area. In an emergency, the rooms can be converted into makeshift cells by locking the door with a lock that can't be opened from the inside (needed if one of the people on the staff snaps during the long winter -- it has happened a few times before at other camps).

The central dome is a combination medical facility/research lab/maintenance section. Behind a locked and reinforced door (PD 4, DR 30) is access to an elevator which goes down about 90 feet to the camp's main power plant -- a Russian-designed and French-improved fission power pack. The power pack has more power than the camp will ever need (it's a two megawatt facility, intended to allow for growth of the base), and the package is entirely sealed. For ops that are sufficiently grim about it, there is enough nuclear material here to build two 1-kiloton devices. A backup diesel generator and enough fuel to last three weeks is also stored in a second shaft on the other side of the dome.

The remaining three arms are: a storage facility with supplies to last five months (six with rationing), a vehicle pool with four snowmobiles and two snowcats and the tools to fix them, and a combination refrigerator/cold lab for handling ice core samples. All of the dome walls are heavy cinder block bricks with reinforced concrete cores, covered in a layer of thermal-resistant material both inside and outside (about PD 5, DR 60 per hexside), and each dome has a backup diesel generator that can keep heat and power for a week.

By the time the team arrives, most of the people there are too busy helping the ops to unload and move their gear inside to notice how they got there -- and even if they do ask, the increasingly bad weather can cover just about anything. The three man caretaker staff (Peter Williams, Nboru Musafi, and Tom Kilroy) will help the players to get settled in. They will let them know that the research team was coming back with core samples that they had just acquired. An astute Science op can get to the samples already gathered (especially if the other ops run interference). The sample room is locked, but the lock is old and easily picked (give anybody that tries to pick it a +3 to the roll). Inside are the core ice samples and two of the "worms" they found. If the Science op makes their Biology or Xenology roll, they'll know that the worms are . . . well, kind of like brainsuckers. A critical success will tell the player that the worms have a lot of different structures than a normal brainsucker worm. Mutation or ice damage, the op isn't sure, but this isn't a normal brainsucker.

The Return of the Prize

About three hours after the team arrives, the science team gets back in, beating the early edge of the storm. By the time the science team gets the samples into the cold lab and gets out of their cold-weather clothes, the storm is fully upon them. The storm is worse that predicted, and even radio transmissions are fully jammed up -- for the next week they are literally on their own (even Ops gear like the Cistron can't get through the storm). Dr. Hunt will insist upon doing an examination of the newest core sample they found -- the one with four oddest worms in it -- and to get to them, the core sample has to be slowly heated as to prevent heat damage to the frozen tissue. This is a long and laborious process that will take several hours.

While the ice sample is being thawed, the team should get to know the members of the science team, especially Dr. Hunt. He will *immediately* be suspicious of the team, thinking that they might be here to steal his research after years of skepticism by the scientific community. As the sample is just about thawed, the whole science team and the ops are there to start examining the newly de-thawed worms when the heater explodes.

The explosion of the heater, due to a faulty heating element, should do no more than stun and give everyone ringing ears and a bad headache for the next few hours; unless they have their hands physically on the box, nobody should take any damage. (If they are touching or are near the heater, take 3D in electrical damage.) As people get patched up and things get cleaned up, they notice there's a problem:

The worms are missing. And there isn't a pile of splattered worm goo anywhere to be seen.

A New Kind of Future

Immediately, the ops should assume the first and biggest problem: that there are four brainsuckers loose. Yet nobody has any injuries to that effect or are showing "zombie" signs (information on brainsuckers should be available to the ops via their databases). Assuming the ops don't overreact and pull out guns and start doing crazy things, the hunt for the core samples should proceed slowly with no appearance of the worms. And if the ops go to guns? The three-man support staff regularly watch the scientists at work, and if they see the ops "go nuts," they'll break out their guns (.45 automatics and Kilroy has a 12 gauge Remington), and they'll try to talk the ops down, and if necessary shoot them.

As long as the ops don't go nuts, the hunt for what the players should be convinced are brainsuckers will probably end without results. They won't find anything except ice shards, and with some luck, the worms in storage can be explained away as any sort of primitive lifeform; in short, an easy job for the ops.

If only they had it so easy.

About a day after the explosion (and assuming the ops are looking for signs of brainsucker infestation), the should notice that certain people, perhaps even the ops themselves, are acting a little odd. This is not like a brainsucker infestation, but odd nevertheless. Dr. Hunt might forget his glasses (which he's blind without, as anyone can see just by looking at them) and is reading like he's got perfect 20/20 vision. Or maybe Emily seems a bit more cheerful. And maybe they'll notice that one of Peter's lost fingers is starting to grow back, slowly but surely.

The GM should choose four people (perhaps even one of the ops) and start having them be changed by the brainsymbiote (see description at the end). If the op(s) are being changed, pass paranoia notes the first two days of the change. After the first two days, the change itself is almost impossible *not* to notice. Whole physiques are being altered and people seem to be growing more intelligent and more agile, as if they were being improved from the inside out. Needless to say, the ops have to figure out why.

If the people infested by the brainsymbiote notice the ops attention (especially if one of them *is* an op; a good option is to tell the infested player what's happening after the game, or discuss it over the phone or e-mail), they will do their best to first avoid notice. This can include doing a lot of work alone or spending time by themselves in their own quarters. The second is to try and arrange for the ops to either have "accidents" or to keep the ops busy with other things. A third option is, if one or more ops is female, is to seduce the op and, even if they use birth control, to infest the op with a symbiote. Their goal is simple -- escape to keep themselves and the symbiotes alive, and have them expand and breed. While this goal and what the symbiotes may do is noble, the ops can't let it happen because of what else could result from their talents.

By the time the fourth day rolls around, even the normal people in the base have to notice that those infested aren't acting "right" anymore. While they might put this down to possibly stress, nearing a snapping point from working in such confined quarters, the ops have to realize that something is going horribly wrong and that the infested have to either be contained or destroyed. The moment the ops start to plan a cleanup of the infested (especially if some of the ops are infested), the infested will strike back. The primary efforts will be to stage lethal "accidents" of all sorts (poisonings in the science area, getting stuck outside with minimal protective gear, and such). If that fails, direct

violence becomes the option, made especially more lethal by the nature of the brainsymbiote itself. If one or more ops is a member of the infested, the team will have to face down their own, heavily armed and knowing all sorts of tricks and techniques to pull.

Assuming the players survive, the survivors among the base staff can be Cocktailed; a story about a burst of group paranoia would cover what exactly happened. While the Company would prefer that one of the infested is captured and brought home safe, their destruction would do just as well. The problem is that where the symbiotes were discovered is now covered in a huge landslide, making access to it impossible short of a nuclear strike -- and perhaps safeguarding its secrets for the ages.

Cast of Characters

Dr. Peter Hunt

A heavy-set, balding man in his middle 60's, utterly humorless.

ST: 11 **DX:** 9 **IQ:** 18 **HT:** 9
Advantages: Academic Status 4 (Professor), Status 2, Absolute Timing, Strong Will +2, Ally Group (Grad Students, 100 point allies, Appear fairly often).
Disadvantages: Bad Sight (farsighted), Overweight, Bad Temper, No Sense of Humor, Rivalry (Toshiro Sanjibe).
Quirks: Hates jokes made about his name (especially Mission: Impossible ones), has a dislike for undergraduate students, thinks that everyone in his field is a bunch of idiots, doesn't like computers.
Skills: Survival (Antarctica)11-, Biochemistry 21-, Genetics 21-, Zoology 21-, First Aid 12-, Research 19-, Computer Operation 11-.

To say that Peter Hunt is annoying but good is like saying the sea is a little salty. Utterly irritating to be around, able to annoy anyone without even trying, he is involved in several feuds with fellow biologists on the origins of life. Well known for the horn-rimmed glasses he wears, as well as his hatred of teaching anyone below the graduate student level, the assignment to Antarctica was intended to get him out of the way. He saw it as a change to prove the idiots wrong.

Emily Orr

Nervously thin woman, mid 20's, brown hair and gray eyes, always either too cheerful or too morose.

ST: 8 **DX:** 12 **IQ:** 20 **HT:** 10

Advantages: Alertness, Intuition, Academic Rank 0 (Graduate Student), Disease Resistant.
Disadvantages: Manic-Depressive, Workaholic, Stubbornness.
Quirks: Always wear something red, can't concentrate without something to squeeze, loves gummy bears (has a huge stash of them in her quarters).
Skills: Survival (Antarctica)12-, Biochemistry 14-, Genetics 11-, Zoology 12-, Research 20-, Computer Operation 14-, Karate Art 12-, Karate 14-, Savoir-Faire (Dojo) 11-.
Martial Arts Maneuvers: Back Kick 12-, Elbow Strike 14-, Kicking 15-, Knee Strike 11-.

Emily Orr is one of the few graduate students to survive (and this is an accurate term) her advisor, Dr. Hunt. The years that she has worked with him have most certainly taken their toll on her body, leaving her depressed with bouts of massive energy (Dr. Hunt ignores her depression and only sees her enthusiasm). Her Karate training was at the insistence of her parents, so she could defend herself if she was attacked, and she kept it up because it got her away from Dr. Hunt.

Toshiro Sanjibe

An ethnic Japanese man, early '30s, very pale skin with black hair and gray eyes.

ST: 9 **DX:** 10 **IQ:** 20 **HT:** 11

Advantages: Intuitive Mathematician, Academic Rank 0 (Graduate Student), Attractive appearance, Absolute Timing, One level of Wealth, Gadgeteer (15-point).
Disadvantages: Shy (minor), Skinny, Lecherousness, Rivalry (Dr. Hunt).
Quirks: Tells bad jokes, hates to be around smokers, works his best to try and beat the computer at calculations.
Skills: Survival (Antarctica)11-, Biochemistry 19-, Genetics 19-, Computer Operations 19-, Electronics Operation (Genetic Analyzer) 19-, Research 19-, Engineer (Genetic Testing)21-.

Toshiro Sanjibe is there only because he holds three different patents on genetic testing equipment. Dr. Hunt and he have a rivalry, apparently due to the money he made in creating several pieces of technology. This dislike keeps them cool during work in the lab, and avoiding each other otherwise. He likes Emily, but is nervous about saying it or even thinking it.

Richard Tomalin

Punk man, of late '20s, dyed blonde hair, green eyes, wears leather clothing whenever possible.

ST: 11 **DX:** 15 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 12

Advantages: Disease Resistant, one level Strong Will, one level Fearlessness, Single-Minded.
Disadvantages: Bloodlust, Major Delusion (you have to wear leather or the dimensional creatures from World 4 will take over your mind), Odious Personal Habit (always hums off-key), Vow (always wear leather), On The Edge.
Quirks: Never eats beans, plays with anything that has a cutting edge on it.
Skills: Sports (Baseball)11-, Knife 14-, Brawling 16-, Language (Spanish) 19-, Survival (Antarctica)11-, Survival (City)14-, Computer Operation/TL7 14-. Zoology 19-, Research 18-, Genetics 18-, Drive Snowmobile 14-.

Richard Tomalin came from probably the worst part of Chicago, and somehow managed to survive the worst public schools to make it to the best in universities studying zoology. Eccentric, he always wears something made of leather near him (due to a bad reaction when younger to LSD) and keeps to himself when not working. With the exception of his dyed blonde hair (it's normally brown), the only real heritage of his punk days is several sharp knives he keeps nearby.

Peter Williams

A balding man in his late '40s, salt-and-pepper hair, with massive forearms covered in scars and tattoos.

ST: 16 **DX:** 11 **IQ:** 15 **HT:** 18

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Ambidexterity, High Pain Threshold, Immunity to Disease, Composed.
Disadvantages: Bully, Gluttony, Stubbornness.
Quirks: Perfectionist, Likes to harass the "new guys," doesn't admit to his sculptures.
Skills: Sculpting 12-, Breath Control 14-, Scuba 11-, Guns/TL7 14-, Judo 14-, Brawling 11-, Computer Operation 11-, Electronics 15-, Physics/TL7 16-, Mechanics (Snowmobiles) 14-, Mathematics 16-, Nuclear Physics TL7 17-, Gambling 11-. Survival (Antarctica)14-.

Formerly a nuclear reactor engineer on an American submarine, Peter Williams is here because he doesn't like the world. This, for him, is the best place for him to be. Any time he's in any other place, he usually tries to either drink people under the table or start a barroom brawl. He's the camp's power technician and main handy man, and is able to

fix just about anything that breaks.

Nboru Musafi

A very dark-skinned man in his '30s, shaved head, with a very long and lanky body.

ST: 10 **DX:** 18 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 14

Advantages: Combat Reflexes, Composed, Toughness, three levels of Strong Will, Intuition.
Disadvantages: Bad Temper, Impulsiveness, Paranoia, Secret (Major, Committed a Murder and doesn't want to admit to it).
Quirks: Loves old movies, acts very pro-African American.
Skills: A/V Operation 12-, Computer Operation 14-, Brawling 11-, Guns/TL7 14-, Cooking 12-, Electronics/TL7 14-, Mechanic (Cars and Engines) 14-, First Aid/TL7 14-, Diagnosis/TL7 14-, Physician/ TL7 15-, Surgery/TL7 11-, Survival (Antarctica)12-, Driving (Snowmobile) 12-.

"Nboru Musafi" is actually Kevin Cooliage from the Bronx -- but he won't ever admit to it because he killed someone when he was about 16 in a hold-up and has been running ever since. Whenever he's out of Antarctica, his trips are *very* quick, usually to get more video tapes and DVDs for the four-channel "TV" network the camp has, running nearly continuously movies and videos that he picks up on his trips.

Tom Kilroy

A short man in his early '30s, dark hair and blue eyes, very well built.

ST: 18 **DX:** 14 **IQ:** 14 **HT:** 15

Advantages: Absolute Direction, Luck (regular), two levels Strong Will **Disadvantages:** Code of Honor (Pirate's Code), Compulsive Behavior (can't help but read anything he can get his hands on).
Quirks: Plays mumbly-peg with knives, will stop to read just about anything that he can read, will never let a problem lie down.
Skills: Judo Art 14-, Judo 14-, Staff 11-, Computer Operation 11-, Guns/TL7 15-, Cooking 16-, Mechanics (Cars and Engines)/TL7 14-, First Aid 11-, Survival (Antarctica)11-, Driving (Snowmobile) 11-, Staff 11-.
Martial Arts Maneuvers: Arm Lock 11-, Breakfall 14-, Finger Lock 14-, Ground Fighting (Judo) 15-, Push 11-.

A grumbly sort of man, Tom Kilroy is mostly someone whom just like to read and be left along more than anything else -- and Antarctica is the perfect place for that. Anyone trying to get into his quarters would find mountains of books laying all over the place, and just as many burned CD-Rs (he's recently purchased a computer at home with a scanner and an OCR -- he'll dismember a book and scan it in). The Aikido training was to provide him with a good exercise, yet it's made him popular with Emily as a sparring partner.

Brainsymbiote

ST: -- **DX:** 11 **IQ:** -- **HT:** 12/2

Move/Dodge: 2/6
PD/DR: 7/7#
Damage: 1d-2 cutting
Reach: C
Size: <1
Weight: About an ounce
Habitat: Just about anywhere

To anybody familiar with the brainsucker, this brainsymbiote looks an awful lot like a bigger version of the

brainsucker, except that it, well, isn't.

The symbiote will enter the body at any possible point, working to anchor itself along the spine of the person, healing the entry wound instantly. After the first few hours, it can't be removed short of surgery or very powerful poisons (and this will kill the infested person). Once in, it starts to make changes in the person, readjusting their metabolism, fixing damage, and rebuilding the body into something more survivable.

Essentially, the symbiote will "buy off" 40 points of physical disadvantages and *some* mental disadvantages per day; as a rule of thumb, if it can be due to a chemical imbalance such as Manic-Depressive, it can be fixed. At the same time, the symbiote will start to develop in ways that are very much survival oriented. Every day, the infested person will spend ten points plus any extra from the "buy off" pool to develop the following sets of Racial Advantages:

- No Brain
- No Cutting/Impaling Bonus
- No Vitals
- Immunity To Poison
- Immunity To Disease
- Enhanced Time Sense
- Unaging
- Faz Sense
- Fast Regeneration
- Regrowth
- Secret Communications w/other Brainsymbiotes (only general concepts, undetectable).

However, with all of these advantages come a massive host of disadvantages, starting with Extremely Hazardous Duty (Involuntary) to spread the species, Enemy (The Company -- once they discover it), Secret (Brainsymbiote host), Chummy, Obsession (spread brainsymbiotes), Infectious Attack, and one level Vulnerability to Fire. The GM is allowed to add any he or she wants, with the exception of any psi-vulnerabilities or any crippling ones; the purpose of the symbiote is to protect the bearer, not to make them more vulnerable.

Pyramid Pick

The Great Brain Robbery

Published by [Cheapass Games](#)

Designed by James Ernest, illustrated by Brian Snoddy

Boxed board game with eight board sections, 60 cards, and rules; $6.00

The Great Brain Robbery is another game from Cheapass Games, which from the outset has three things going for it. First off it has a title that just grabs the imagination; secondly, it's a Cheapass Game; and thirdly, it's a zombie game. In fact, it's a game about the same zombies from Friedy's Restaurant, who starred in Cheapass' previous titles, *Give Me The Brain* and *Lord of the Fries*. The problem is, as ever, that they're short of brains at Friedy's Restaurant and the only source of zombie fast food is a speeding passenger train full of Government Cheeses. More of the cheeses later.

The game, which is for three to seven players, comes in a sturdy envelope-style cardboard box; hopefully they will use more of these for their games in the future as the normal envelopes are not as sturdy. The box contains the necessary components for the game -- eight double-sided board sections depicting the various carriages of the train, sixty cards representing the brains found aboard the train (plus the Government Cheese) and the four-page rules leaflet. This being a Cheapass Game, you need to raid your other games for the basic bits. In this case they are two six-sided dice, a playing piece for each player, and approximately fifty counters, which mark the location of each brain on the map boards.

The aim of The Great Brain Robbery is to end the game with your zombie having installed in its empty cranial cavity the brain with the highest IQ. Though the map boards are clear and workman-like, artist Brain Snoddy has done an excellent job on the brain cards. These are all individually illustrated, (except the Government Cheeses) often to highly amusing effect, such as a zombie trying to shove a cat into his head!

Play begins in the caboose at the rear of the train, with each zombie moving in turn up to the limit of a 2d6 roll. If they end their turn on a brain square with a counter, they collect the counter as an experience point and draw a brain card. They can discard or keep the brain, but may only carry two brains -- one in each hand. A player can start a fight with one or more zombies if he ends his move in their square. The highest roll of the dice wins the fight, and the winner has the option to steal or rearrange the brains in his opponent's heads!

At the end of their turn they may spend experience to install the brain in their head. The higher the IQ value of brain, the greater the amount of experience that must be spent to install it, ranging from zero for Government Cheeses to twelve for an IQ of 240! Once installed, a brain card is placed face up on the table in front of the player. Brains are the keys to playing and winning the game. Some give movement and combat bonuses, as well as an occasional special move individual to that card, but without a brain installed, a zombie rolls one less die for both movement and combat, for each brain they carry. One option is to install a government cheese, as this acts in place of a brain, but since a cheese has no IQ, the game cannot be won with a cheese installed.

Zombies can also move between carriages and as they move forward, a randomly selected new map board is placed in front of the last and the brain counters filled. Unfortunately, zombies have an irrational attraction to hammering out the pins that connects up the train, and as the rear carriages slow down they may be lost. This is rolled when a zombie moves between carriages. As long as they keep rolling less than the length of the train a carriage will be destroyed and

lost from the rear of the train. Zombies in these lost carriages find themselves running behind the still moving train, forced to discard any brains in their hands (but still with their experience points and their installed brain). While running they cannot fight, and will climb aboard the rear of the train at the beginning of their next turn.

Lost carriages are discarded from the game, except for the caboose, which is reshuffled into the deck of map boards. When it is drawn again, it is turned over. The other side depicts the engine and thus the front of the train. This signals the nearing end of the game, as a zombie can reach the brakes and slow the train. This destroys the rearmost carriage for each turn of braking, and once the engine is the only thing left, the game is over and the zombie with the smartest brain installed is the winner.

Like many other Cheapass designs, ***The Great Brain Robbery*** has deceptively simple rules that anyone can grasp. It also has a given strategy, which is pleasingly outlined by the designer as part of the rules. Further, it would be very easy to create your own rules variations and expansions for anyone who likes to tinker with their games. An obvious aspect that could be tinkered with is giving more brain cards individual special moves. That only a few in the game have these is really my only gripe about the game.

The Great Brain Robbery is another hugely fun slice of silliness from James Ernest, which has all the makings of a parlor classic. (And the title is really, really great.)

-- Matthew Pook

Pyramid Review

Hunter Apocrypha (for the Hunter RPG)

Published by White Wolf Game Studio

Written by Tim Dedopulos

128 pages; $14.95

If you're not a fan of "in character" game documents, you'll hate this book. You know what I mean: books and other paraphernalia that exist as physical objects for players to use as their characters would. Although far from the first company to publish such things (after all, most of Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu* adventures include pages of fake "newspaper clippings" and other such clues), White Wolf has produced quite a number of books in this vein, including the ***Book of Nod*** and ***Revelations of the Dark Mother*** for ***Vampire: The Masquerade***. *Hunter Apocrypha* follows in their footsteps, showing us what purports to be the musings, prophecies, and ramblings of a mysterious hunter known only as "Fyodor."

If you're not a fan of metaplot, you'll hate this book as well. ***Hunter Apocrypha's*** contents are quite obviously tied into the ongoing story of ***Hunter: The Reckoning*** - and quite possibly, White Wolf's forthcoming "Before the ***World of Darkness*** Game" (more on that in a moment). More so than most ***World of Darkness*** games, ***Hunter*** relies very heavily on the fact that hunters (also called "the imbued") are a new phenomenon, one whose sudden and inexplicable appearance may well herald the beginning of the End Times. Consequently, this book is quite useless to anyone uninterested in or otherwise annoyed by this element of the ***Hunter*** game line.

However, if you are put off neither by in character documents nor by metaplot, this book delivers in some remarkable ways. Let me be honest: ***Hunter*** was a big disappointment to me. I expected something wholly different than what I got when I read the book almost a year ago. That I was mistaken about the theme and mood of ***Hunter*** says more about White Wolf's poor marketing of the game than it does about the game itself. Over the last year, the game has grown and developed in entirely unexpected - but not unwelcome - ways. ***Hunter Apocrypha*** is yet another example of this development.

Physically, the book is a digest-sized volume with a pseudo-leatherette black cover embossed with its title in shiny red ink. The title page of the book lists it as having been published by "Anchorite Press." This is followed by a forward written by the hunter known by his Internet handle of "Violin99." Violin explains to the reader that ***Hunter Apocrypha*** is a collection of notes passed on to him by Fyodor "to answer the questions that plague the chosen," which is to say, as an aid to other hunters still grappling with their mysterious calling and the abilities that come with it. Violin then goes on to suggest, "this is the single most important document in the world." While clearly hyperbole, ***Hunter Apocrypha*** is a very valuable book for anyone seeking a very different - and much more sophisticated - take on ***Hunter: The Reckoning***.

The pages of ***Hunter Apocrypha*** mimic a compilation of handwritten notes, complete with black and white illustrations and marginal doodles. Also, included are the obligatory fake newspaper clippings, used to buttress some of the information Fyodor passes on in his notes. Again, I suspect that readers who instinctively dislike the format of books like this will grimace upon seeing the interior of ***Hunter Apocrypha***. I'm somewhat skeptical of the format myself. Nevertheless, I can't deny that I spent some time attempting to fathom the hidden meanings of some of the pages' marginalia (mostly to no avail). I won't go so far as to say the illustration are in any way "authentic," but they do convey well some of the oddity and disjunction you'd expect in the ravings of a mad (but possibly brilliant) visionary.

The meat of the book consists in Fyodor's examination of three questions of immediate import, both to the imbued and to anyone interested in Hunter. These questions are: What are the imbued? What are the monsters they fight? What does the future hold? The answers to these three questions are tied together in a coherent - if not necessarily accurate - explanation that, to my mind, propels *Hunter* into a territory very different than its apparent "Human: The Butt-Kicking" mold. In fact, Fyodor's answers are such that the almost entirely recast *Hunter: The Reckoning* as a game line.

(Editor's Note: Spoiler Alert)

Specifically, Fyodor tells the tale of an ancient Golden Age of Mankind, in which men possessed both great powers and greater goals. One of those goals resulted in a terrible fall, one that clove man's soul in two. The dark half achieved an independent existence, becoming the origin of the various dark beings of the world. Nevertheless, human heroes fought against the darkness but did not defeat it. Instead, the darkness went into hiding and manipulated human society until the time was again ripe for its resurgence. According to Fyodor, that time is now, which is why the imbued - the inheritors of those ancient heroes' power - have again returned. However, Fyodor's vision is not a happy one. He foresees - perhaps even welcomes - a final consummation in which the great mass of humanity will be lost to the darkness, while hunters save only those worthy of the New Golden Age that will be born.

Hunter Apocrypha thus paints a very different picture of the imbued and their role than we have seen before. No longer errant do-gooders seeking only to defeat individual monsters, they are the vanguard of the End Times - from which much of humanity will not escape alive. The book's apocalyptic tone and elitist airs left me with a bad taste in my mouth. I had previously had great sympathy with the hunters' mission as guardians against the darkness. Now, that mission is less clear-cut and tempered with elements that, frankly, make me uncomfortable.

(End Spoiler Alert)

Not surprisingly, I'm also much more certain of how to run a *Hunter* chronicle - and the drama that would inevitably result from that certainty. *Hunter Apocrypha* adds a great deal of nuance and menace to *Hunter: The Reckoning*. I recommend it highly to anyone who didn't think the core rulebook offered anything unique or different. After reading *Hunter Apocrypha*, I think a lot of people will reevaluate this game.

-- James Maliszewski

Pyramid Review

Cardstock Cowboys Sets 1, 2, & 3 (for Deadlands)

Produced by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Set 1: Sixteen 8-1/2"-11" cardstock sheets; $19.95
Sets 2 and 3: Eight 8-1/2"-11" cardstock sheets; $14.95 each

Miniatures are fun. In a situation where you need to understand the tactical significance of "Who is where?" or "*How* many are there?", miniatures are wonderful for summing up complex situations quickly and easily.

But miniatures are expensive. A full army of the damned (or what have you) would set back most groups a fair chunk of change. And without a full set (or consistency within that set), you run the risk of destroying suspension of disbelief by having fully-detailed PCs battling undead legions of candy corn (or whatever is handy near the table).

Several companies have attempted to solve both of these problems by releasing cardboard miniatures: scads of characters suitable for generic or specific games that groups can cut out and assemble. This review focuses on the *Cardstock Cowboys* series from Pinnacle for the *Deadlands* game (or, as they proclaim, using the free miniatures rules High Noon available from the *Deadlands* website (www.deadlands.com).

The standard miniatures stand 1-1/4" tall when assembled (with figures varying in size depending on their scale). Most figures are made from three panels, with the hole made from this open triangular tube viewable from the top. These three panels consist of two identical images and a black mirrored silhouette on the third face. Differing figures range from the tiny (like the Clockwork Tarantulas) to the mid-sized (like people on horseback, Demons, and Devil Bats), to the huge (like the Maze Dragon and Mojave Rattler, each of which take up an entire sheet of the 8-1/2"-11" cardboard!). Other miniatures are not assembled, but lie flat on the table. These include the bity Prarie Ticks, the large Tarantula Swarm, and the huge Armored Locomotive (which consists of four cars, each of which is about 10" long, and a smaller caboose). The figures are printed in color on sturdy but light coated cardboard; they work much better when they are scored first before folding -- but *only* when scored with, say, the flat of the X-Acto knife The cardboard is much too light to score with all but the gentlest edged cut.

Set one is the "Starter Pack." It consists of a wide variety of basic figures and critters. Many of the human figures are suitable for player characters, though there are also a fair number of bandits, cultists, desperados, and other human opponents. There are also over forty figures depicted on horseback. With the exception of the Maze Dragon and Mojave Rattler, this set doesn't have many truly inspiring or horrifying monsters . . . but a wide variety of fodder is useful for many campaigns. In all there are over 200 figures in this pack.

Set two is called "Horrors of the Weird West." It consists of some of creatures from the first and second *Rascals, Varmints, and Critters* books. These figures are a lot more horrifying and inspiring, but since most of the figures are unique or usually encountered singly, there isn't much duplication. On the other hand, there *is* a lot of white space (which there isn't in the first or third sets). I found myself saying, "Gee, they could have squeezed in a dozen or so more figures on here. The second set consists of 86 figures.

Set three is called "Infernal Devices." It focuses on the gizmos and gadgets of the Weird West, like the train mentioned above, steam wagons, an ornithopter, steam gatling guns, velocipedes, and other armaments. It also has a fair number

of human (more or less) figures, like scrappers and people in jetpacks and rocket boots. There are also some of the mechanical antagonists from **Rascals, Varmints, and Critters 2**, like Automatons and the Clockwork Tarantulas. There are 116 figures in this set.

In all, these sets are somewhat of a mixed bag. The artwork ranges from unclear and muddied to crisp and exciting. Set 1 consists of a lot of artwork I've seen before, like many of the character templates; but what looks good on a full-sized page loses something when shrunk down. The scale of the first set is also problematic in a few places for this reason. For example, the Blessed #1 figure (which uses the Preacher template artwork) has his right arm raised above his head; to fit him in, he needed to be shrunk down, so it looks like a l'il tiny four-and-a-half-foot tall preacher. *(Aww!)* Sets 2 and 3 are better, art-wise, and most (if not all) of the art seems unique to those sets, but these sets are also the most setting specific.

Each figure is labeled, which is very useful for the figures that you can't exactly make out, or for those times where you need to find all the cultists. Unfortunately (for some), each figure generally uses the same art work on two of the three facings; in that way, it's very difficult to determine which way a figure is pointed (you can tell which way he *isn't* facing by the silhouette). This lack of facing is easily fixed, however, by marking one corner of each figure to represent "front" . . . but it would be a pain.

Curiously, some figures *are* mirrored; all the horseback characters, for example, have a definite orientation. I suspect this is because these figures don't have a silhouette, which would make determining where they face difficult. The lack of non-animate figures (like cacti and other oft-repeating **Deadlands** scenery bits) may also prove problematic for some groups, and might have rounded out the emptier second set.

In conclusion, these figures are an inexpensive way to provide useful miniatures at an inexpensive price for **Deadlands**. While I understand that getting any kind of detail at these sizes is very difficult, the muddied coloring and artwork on some of the figures doesn't help much, and keeps me from recommending them without reservation. The cost of the second and third sets -- which have about half as many figures as the first set but only cost five dollars less each -- also gives me pause. But if the figures on the top sheet (visible through the plastic wrapping) seem like something that would be useful to your group, and you can overlook the faults, then it should provide pleasing alternatives to rampaging armies of Pez.

-- Steven Marsh

Montejon's Mutters

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn

Published by [Interplay Entertainment Corp.](#)

Developed by Bioware Corp.

Required: Windows 95/98 with DirectX 7.0 or higher, Pentium II 233 or faster (although I used an AMD processor with no problems), 32MB RAM, 800MB Hard Drive space for installation, 4X CD-ROM drive, DirectX certified sound card, 4MB DirectX certified video card, 100% Microsoft compatible keyboard, mouse

4 CD's + 264 page manual, $44.99

"Guerre mener n'est que damnation."
-- Eustace Deschamps

1 -- Stop the Presses! Please!
2 -- Buyer's Regret
3 -- Worth the Price of Admission
4 -- A Fine Addition to the Library
5 -- Buy Buy Buy!

Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn is the latest, hottest entrant into the realm of computer-based roleplaying games. It has lavish graphics, stunning audio, and the state-of-the-art in storyline development. If you play through just the core story, you've got about 50 hours of gameplay ahead of you. If you allow yourself to be sidetracked by the optional subplots, you can add another 200 hours of play. It's massive; it's innovative; I rated it a 2.

We'll get into the why's and wherefore's of that rating in a moment. First I'd like to explain why I've reviewed it at all. The 'net is crammed to bursting with computer gaming sites, why invade *Pyramid* with the stuff? I have a couple reasons: **BG2** is specifically a ***Dungeons & Dragons*** computer game. Also, I hope to offer you a perspective uniquely tailored to *Pyramid* subscribers. However, if you would prefer not to see computer roleplaying games in Montejon Mutters, please let me know. I read the [Pyramid Discussion Group](#) regularly.

Set in the epic fantasy world of the ***Forgotten Realms***, often billed as "The Granddaddy of All **D&D** Worlds" for reasons that remain obscure, the plot of BG2 has only a tenuous connection to the original ***Baldur's Gate***. In fact, except for a few brief jaunts into various other Planes, the Underdark, and the sea, your characters never leave the nation of Amn. You certainly never get anywhere near the actual city of Baldur's Gate. The connection between **BG2** and the original ***Baldur's Gate*** is maintained by a handful of recurring characters (including the cheerfully insane ranger Minsc and his pet Miniature Giant Space Hamster) and the fact that the main character is still the son of Bhaal, the late God of Murder. Your main opponent throughout the game is a sneering, sociopathic wizard with a lovely accent, against whom you must ultimately face off in the very bowels of Hell. Along the way you get to do battle with the cream of ***Forgotten Realms*** villainy, including the drow, mind flayers, beholders, and a couple of dragons.

All righty then. Let's start with what I liked about ***Baldur's Gate II***.

1. *Graphics.* They were pretty. They reminded me strongly of other games with pretty graphics, like the latest pair of Final Fantasy offerings, and the Abe line of console games.

2. *Voice acting.* Much of the voice acting in **BG2** is nothing short of brilliant. There are a few ringers in the mix, but for the most part the actors have good lines, and deliver them well. The only thing that really bugged me was the way they pronounced the main villain's name.
3. *Compelling story.* This surprised me. Computer RPG's very rarely have any story worth spitting at, but I found myself quite put out when the villain abducted one of my compatriots. Many of the subplots lacked the same sparkle, but there was more chance to develop a strong characterization than in any other computer role-playing game I've seen. The plot was still quite linear, but it was a lot more fun than the typical "find the McGuffin before the Naughty Necromancer unleashes Doom upon the Universe."
4. *Marketing Tie-ins.* This isn't really part of the game itself, but in the electronics stores where I found **BG2** they were selling ***Dungeons & Dragons 3rd Edition Player's Guides*** and ***Dungeon Master Guides*** as well. It was evident that the **D&D3** books were selling. The hitch in this is that **BG2** uses the ***Advanced Dungeons & Dragons 2nd Edition*** rules. Still, it's nice to see computer games serving as a direct tie-in to PNP (Pen aNd Paper) roleplaying.

Now we'll run down what I didn't like.

1. *Anachronism.* This seems like a silly quibble, since this is a fantasy game set in the ***Forgotten Realms***, a notoriously eclectic milieu. Still, the setting for the opening scene looked like something straight out of a sci-fi thriller. There were steel floors, cables, and lottsa giant glass orbs and tubes. What really made me flinch was finding a porcelain bathtub in the sewers, which connected to hole-in-a-board style commodes. Later, during one of the optional subplots, I wound up wielding a "magic rod" that looked suspiciously like a blast rifle. I found this jarring.
2. *Hack 'n' Slash.* My quote for this column translates as "To wage war is damnation," and it sums up quite nicely my attitude towards games that focus on violence. Unfortunately, computers only have two things to offer the gamer right now. You can have pretty graphics, and fast combats. Because computer roleplaying games have no way to support the common group structure of a small party of Player Characters with a single Game Master, storylines must be linear and character development must be limited. To make up for this you get lots and lots of splashy combats. In **BG2** you get splashy combats out the wazzoo, and there is no way to avoid them. It makes group play very annoying, because you must reload frequently after everyone gets splattered by a sudden vampire ambush, or a bunch of beholders zap you into oblivion with Cause Serious Wounds. Sometimes combat games can be fun, but there are many, many better combat games than **BG2**.
3. *Rules Set.* **BG2** uses the ***2nd Edition AD&D*** rules, as mentioned previously. At the last minute they tacked on three classes from ***3rd Edition*** -- the barbarian, the sorcerer, and the monk. If you've played ***3rd Edition***, **BG2** will drive home for you how inferior the ***2nd Edition*** rules are to ***3rd Edition***. The addition of the three classes does nothing to ameliorate this.
4. *Compatibility.* I use a pretty solid Windows box, so I was able to play **BG2**. If you have anything else, like one of those whiz-bang new Macintoshes, a finely-honed Linux box, or even an out-dated Windows machine, you're out of luck. (However, the developer's next **D&D** release, ***Neverwinter Nights***, is under simultaneous development for Macintosh and Linux operating systems.)

As a computer game, ***Baldur's Gate II*** probably rocks. As a roleplaying game or roleplaying game supplement, it leaves much to be desired. I found nothing in the game that I could use elsewhere. It was expensive, and can only be played if you have the right hardware to play it on. It was only really fun to play if I played alone, killing the social benefits that make roleplaying games worthwhile to me.

So, with all this in mind, I rated it a 2: Buyer's Regret. In a few months, when the price drops appreciably, its rating will increase to 3: Worth the Price of Admission, but only as a solitary entertainment. As a group enterprise, ***Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn*** is a bust.

* * *

Next time on Montejon Mutters we'll dodge back into the realm of the tabletop with my first requested review. If you have a review request of your own, send it on in to montejon@mad.scientist.com and be sure to put [REVIEW] in the subject line. See you in a fortnight.

--Montejon Smith

Lethean Days

"How did you get that mark on your neck?" asked Sir Ross.

Lady Alyse laughed. "You well know how I received this, Sir," she said, winking.

No, I don't, *he thought, looking at her suspiciously.* No, I don't.

* * *

"Lethean Days" is a short *very* generic idea suitable for many campaigns, from Fantasy to **Mage** to *Star Trek*; the only requirement is *some* ephemeral supernatural entity needs to be possible (being of pure energy, demons, spirits . . . whatever). Details will, of course, need to be created, depending on the campaign and situation.

This scenario is perfect as a subplot or secondary story; it requires one PC Victim, and conspiracy between the GM and the other players. Its theme is one of paranoia and fear.

Ingredients

The Downward Spiral

It starts out innocently enough with unrelated events. A friend repeats something witty the Victim said before. The Patron requests a report the Victim promised two weeks ago. The Victim notices a mark on a romantic interest's neck; when questioned, he replies coyly: "You know how that happened."

But the Victim doesn't have any idea what they're talking about. She never said that; she didn't promise any reports; she didn't have any neck-altering amorous affairs.

If questioned, the friends of the Victim may be frightened, suspicious, or understanding. The Victim may well suspect a doppelganger, clone, or imposter (if such exist in the game world).

In fact, the Victim *did* do all those things; she just doesn't remember.

The GM should conspire with the rest of the party beforehand (individually or as a group) to have them "recall" things the Victim did that she is unaware of. (Ideas: Presents given in the past, asking the Victim to enter the security code of the new security system installed, etc.) The GM should *not* tell the other PCs why they are doing this; as the plot unfolds, they will be able to help the Victim, and the story works best if they don't know what's going on. Other NPCs can recall events as necessary, too.

The GM should carefully consider what these clues refer to, and instruct the other players accordingly; more recent memories will point to a doppelganger, older memories will point to memory loss.

Further Down

After a while (perhaps once the Victim starts to think something weird is happening), up the ante: The Duke asks if the message was delivered safely to the Prince. The President inquires what the French ambassador said about Operation: Turnkey in the last adventure. ("He didn't mention it," the Victim says suspiciously.)

Left unchecked, this forgetfulness eventually spreads to memorized spells, knowledge, training, etc. The GM can simulate this by asking the Victim to make certain skills at default levels, or applying ridiculous penalties to trivial knowledge checks.

Eventually the Entity (see below) will leave the Victim a memoryless husk, unable to retain anything for more than a few seconds. She can then work at the DMV.

Cooking Tips

The Entity   Adventure Pizza: Lethean Days

The Victim's problems are being caused by an Entity that feeds off memories. It starts out small, tasting simple recollections and trivial matters; as it grows it consumes more vivid and powerful memories. (This scenario presumes a psychic/energy/mental phenomenon; it *can* be a physical object -- burrowing brain bug or the like -- but the means of dealing with it would be different, probably entailing surgery.)

The GM should determine how it can be discovered: magical spells, psionic powers, Jedi Mind Tricks™, entering the Astral/Ethereal realms, or meditative states are all possibilities.

The GM should also determine how it can be defeated. Some possibilities are:

- **Reasoning.** The Entity doesn't realize that what it's doing is wrong. With good roleplaying it can be convinced to move on . . . if a means of communicating with it can be established.
- **Combat.** The Entity is hostile, and must be attacked on its own terms. This can be direct Astral/psychic combat, or weird dream-realm confrontations with past memories and failings.
- **Overfeeding.** By encountering something *so* vivid and exciting, the Entity may overfeed to bursting and flee or die. This can be a bittersweet resolution of an exciting session; the PCs may witness the birth of a star or the hatching of a Baby Wyrm, and the Victim will be unable to remember it (though she'll be free of the Entity).
- **Poisoning.** By encountering something traumatic, the Victim may "sour the milk" of the Entity. This can be real (a loved one dies horribly) or staged (the Victim starts a vicious argument with an unknowing loved one to get honest hateful reactions). Alternately the Victim may be placed in mortal danger, causing the Entity to flee rather than die with the Victim.

Extra Spice

- As a subplot spread out over several sessions, this scenario's clues are obscured, and the fear and paranoia are more real. As the Entity grows more powerful, a villain may show up that the other heroes recognize, but the Victim doesn't. (The "real" first encounter with this villain can be played as a flashback.)
- This scenario also works well in a Time Travel situation; lapses of events and memory can be explained away as burps in the time stream.
- What if a clone or doppelganger *is* present at the same time as this scenario? It would be farfetched, unless the Entity and clone were the works of a villain, but they would work well together. The Victim *or* other heroes may think they've solved the problem, but the contingency plan remains.

Side Salad

- If the Entity is part of a race of such beings, what would happen if they attacked a group or organization en masse?
- The GM should determine if the memory loss is temporary or permanent. (For fairness' sake, skills and

knowledges, at least, should return.) Reacquiring these memories could be an adventure itself.

- What does the Entity *do* with these memories? Are they being transmitted to some higher (more sinister) being?

Revenge of Clio's Nightmares

"[I]f we had been confronted at the beginning of May with such a prospect, it would have seemed incredible that at the end of a period of horror and disaster, or at this point in a period of horror and disaster, we should stand erect . . . Few would have believed we could survive . . . "
-- Sir Winston Churchill, Aug. 20, 1940

As on [Halloweekends past](#), this year sees the gates of History and Destiny swing wide along with the gates to Death and Hell. Through those dubious portals, then, come three more Alternate-Historical Horrors, this year in a slightly less High Fantastic than Secret-Historical mode, more *GURPS Voodoo* and less *GURPS Undead.* If the sleep of reason (and the sleep of Clio the [last two](#) All Hallows' Eves) bringeth forth monsters, this year the sleep of Clio bringeth forth, well, this.

"[A]we overcame the archons in the presence of the creature because it uttered sounds superior to what its modeling justified, owing to the agent who had invisibly deposited in it a seed of the higher essence . . . And they were stricken with terror, and promptly destroyed it."
-- a fragment of the scripture of Valentinus of Phrebonis

In 141 A.D., the elders of Christianity met in the Roman catacombs to elect the next Pope. The two candidates, Valentinus of Phrebonis and Pius of Aquilea, had been equally matched until Pius' most eloquent spokesman, Justin "the Philosopher," was torn apart by feral pigs in the street. Dismayed at this, the Pian side gave way to the gnostic, mystical Valentinus, whose words wove an eloquent spell around the deacons. They also converted the Emperor Marcus Aurelius' son and heir, Commodus, who turned his father's persecutions against Valentinus' rivals. Eventually, the Emperors openly declared Valentinian Christianity the state religion of Rome, driving trinitarian and demotic heretics like John Chrysostom and Athanasius east into the arms of Persia, where Yezdigerd the Holy made Augustine the Patriarch of Ctesiphon, and accepted baptism himself. Valentinian Christianity, with its Egyptian gnostic priesthood and levels of initiation, married the elitism of the mystery cults to the mass appeal of Christ -- and for those that rejected Iesus-Seth Christos, there were crosses aplenty. The inner fathers of the church knew that Valentinus had taken more than his priests out of his native Egypt -- that Valentinus hid a far older, darker god behind his allegories of Christ as Seth, third son of Adam. Set, third son of Geb, god of the desert wind, of trickery and evil, of war and murder, was the true "hidden god" of the Roman church.

Hints slipped out here and there: when the Emperor Maxentius burned the True Cross, or when churches to St. Simon Magus opened up through Anatolia, or when the Bishop of Alexandria singled out the priests of Horus and Osiris for death by torture. But it wasn't until the Persians briefly captured Egypt in the war of 504 that the extent of Valentinus' secret blasphemy became known. The next war, everyone knows, will be an unholy war to the finish; the Valentinian church must use their every hoarded dark magic to crush Persia utterly or see the Light of Truth prevail. PCs in this *GURPS Imperial Rome-Egypt* crossover can be Persian knights, ecstatic Christian monks with strange martial disciplines learned under Roman persecution, miracle-wielding priests, or Holy Magi puzzling over the papyri brought back from the Egyptian raid. Persia and Christianity's only hope rests on just such a tiny band -- they must cross the entire Roman Empire, dodging not only the Roman army but lamiae, mummies, demons, and Set-beasts conjured up by a desperate dark gnosis. For those papyri tell that the Holy Grail was spirited to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea, and may hold the power to break Set's grasp on Rome -- if the PCs can convince [King Arthur](#) to help them find it.

"At her trial La Voisin confessed that no less than 2,500 babies had been disposed of in this manner, for the Black Mass was continually being celebrated not only by Guibourg but by other priests. The figures are so startling that some incredulity has been expressed by those who do not know the Paris of Louis XIV . . . [W]hen the impostume of filth and crime was ripe to bursting, no less than 319 warrants were issued, whilst there were very many more whose names were suppressed so deeply did they implicate the very highest in the land, nay, the very Throne itself . . . "
-- Montague Summers, *A Popular History of Witchcraft*

Desperate to retain the affections of Louis XIV, his aging mistress, Madame de Montespan, turned to Satanism. At some point in 1679, she succeeded in bringing a succubus to the royal bed, and the depraved monarch's eyes were

opened to the delights of Hell. A black bargain, sealed with a kiss. Louis and Lucifer, it transpired, could do much for each other -- Lucifer guaranteed demonic aid to his new ally, and Louis forsook the divine right of kings for the more lucrative infernal right of kings. Black storms helped his navies drive the Dutch from the sea; sudden earthquakes reduced fortresses besieged by France's armies. Demons discovered buried treasures for Louis' coffers, including the lost treasure of the Templars -- within which were yet more artifacts of blackest sorcery to swell the arsenals of Louis' royal guardsmen. Louis' marshals crushed Holland, humiliated the Empire, and entered Rome to appoint the Satanist Guibourg to the Papacy. La Voisin's troops of whores and defrocked priests desecrated the great cathedrals of France, turning them into fanes of blackest necromancy rivaled only by the orgiastic altars at Versailles.

That, of course, is where Sir Isaac Newton, the greatest theurgickal magician since Dee, comes in. His experiments with angelic forces, and his calculations of their relative gravities, have convinced him that Satan is alive and working actively within the French court. In the confused political atmosphere of Queen Anne's England, Newton can only trust hand-picked men, devout (if scruffy) London footpads, Huguenot refugee swordsmen from the Pit of Paris, scholars of forgotten Biblical lore, Puritan divines and Anglican clerics of spotless sanctity, a few witch-finders recommended by his American correspondent Cotton Mather, and apprentices of his own Newtonian natural-angelic philosophy. They must work against French Satanism, an Invisible College devoted to driving Lucifer back to Hell from his beachhead in Europe. Between J. Gregory Keyes' *Newton's Cannon* and the breathless intrigue of Dennis Wheatley's *Black Magic* series, the GM should have no trouble finding themes and ideas for this **GURPS Swashbucklers-Religion** campaign.

"The Great Race seemed to form a single, loosely knit nation or league, with major institutions in common, although there were four definite divisions. The political and economic system of each unit was a sort of fascistic socialism . . ."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "The Shadow Out of Time"

Stalin had long known that there was no God. It wasn't, however, until he correlated some of the wilder tales from his Georgian hill-country home with the results of the 1927 Tunguska expedition and the secret diaries of Rasputin that he knew that there were, nonetheless, gods. The NKVD fanned out across the Soviet empire, looting libraries and museums, torturing Siberian shamans and elderly monks, stealing what they could from foreigners, always looking for hints of the elder mythology that now obsessed their steel tsar. In the aftermath of World War II, this trickle of data became a flood, as the Ahnenerbe archives of Nazi occult research fell into Soviet hands along with Berlin. Stalin now knew the Names to call on when the stars were right, the places of power where They scrabbled at the edge of space, the truth that mankind was, just as Marx had promised, the puppet of vast, impersonal forces. And he knew how to bend those forces to his implacable will. Truman might have stopped him, but Alger Hiss painted a certain hexagram in the Oval Office that killed the Cold Warrior. Stalin gladly offended Mao by holding Sinkiang and adding Tibet to his prizes in the confusion of 1949. With the invasion of Afghanistan in 1951, he completed his conquest of the earthly gates to Leng, and to Kadath in the Cold Waste. Egypt fell first to Nasser and then Nasser succumbed to Stalin. Armies of slaves worked gulag mines to supply the Mi-Go with rare Siberian minerals; thousands died in screaming agonies to placate Nyarlathotep; arctic explorers dug up Elder technologies and drove physicists mad trying to utilize them. And then, they succeeded. In 1962, the undying Stalin plans to launch the Third World War -- unless he's stopped.

A young Naval officer named John F. Kennedy became a Delta Green "friendly" after something very unusual attacked PT-109 in the South Pacific. Now, he's just been elected President, and Delta Green has decided that it's worth breaking cover to stop Stalin. PCs in this **GURPS Atomic Horror-Delta Green** crossover campaign must battle Communist subversion at home and inhuman evil abroad or the world will die screaming under Stalinist sorcery, swept clean for the Great Old Ones by atomic fire and the emanations of Yog-Sothoth. Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask rather what you can do for your species.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

I Will Show You Fear in a Handful of Dice

This is not a Halloween issue.

Or rather, it is.

But this is not a Halloween issue about horror. This is a Halloween issue about fear, and suspense, and fun.

Horror is blood streaming from the faucets. Fear is the taste of blood on your lips when you awaken . . . when you *know* you haven't been biting your lip in your sleep. Horror is when **It** attacks you from the closet with a knife. Suspense is a knife on the counter you know you didn't put there. Horror is when the Goblin Spectre tries to grab you in his steely clutches. Fun is when the mask is pulled off, and it's Old Man Potter.

I believe it was Stephen King who said that one of the difficulties with horror writing is the six-foot-tall cockroach problem. The protagonist opens the door, and there's . . . a *six-foot-tall cockroach!!!* And the reader is frightened, and screams, but then thinks, "Well, at least it wasn't a *seven*-foot-tall cockroach . . ." and is no longer scared.

In my mind, that's one of the troubles with focussing on horror for Halloween themes; whenever you give something a name and stats, you can kill it. But if it's the Unnamed Thing, the Unknown Threat, the Sinister Secret . . . these things can't be easily overcome.

But Halloween is also about suspense. *The Blair Witch Project* was all about suspense; almost nothing *actually* horrific happens, but the implication of things keeps happening off-screen, almost out of earshot, almost within sight, forever out of reach. Halloween is the time when we look nervously over our shoulders because we didn't hear anything, but the anticipation something might happen looms omnipresent.

Halloween is also a time of fear. Stories told with flashlights under chins, urban legends you *swear* are true, pranks designed to frighten the innocent (and guilty). Horror is generally "satisfied" (you're attacked, you die, you gibber in an asylum for the rest of your days); fear is just as likely to leave you alone, knowing it's won.

And for most folks, Halloween is, frankly, fun. Halloween is one of the few opportunities for most adults to "roleplay" in the real world. If you want to walk down the street as a devil or a superhero or a fairy, you can. Adults in America spend more for Halloween than any other holiday except Christmas. Kids run around at Mach 5 on sugar buzzes their parents will regret for weeks.

So this issue I wanted to keep with a Halloweenie theme, but I wanted to make sure many people would find *something* useful/fun/entertaining. I hope you all enjoy.

To tie these random thoughts into roleplaying, I'd urge folks to realize that genres and traditions are usually about multiple ideas. If you have a Horror campaign, remember that a zombie doesn't *have* to lurk around every corner; consider adding suspense or even fun occasionally. If you're running a Supers campaign, not every adventure needs to revolve around the awesome powers these superbeings have. A *Vampire* game *can* be optimistic and happy, occasionally. This keeps folks from becoming complacent with the status quo; if every adventure feels the same, it's much too easy to become numb. Variety helps keep players on their toes.

Or, for GMs looking for a greater challenge, figure out a way to sometimes make those seemingly-unrelated adventures tie into the overall theme. If the adventurers manage to uncover the mundane cop-bribery conspiracy within the police department in a *Cthulhu* campaign, have it be revealed that some of the money was being filtered to a dark cult. If the coterie in *Vampire* helps the prince do something that seems entirely altruistic and nice, have that be a catalyst for the prince's trial or even death.

Of course, you can't do this every time, or else players will stop believing *anything* a GM does, and always expect the worst. But keeping players on their toes and unexpecting the expected is one of the greatest challenges -- and thrills --

of being a GM.

As ever, feel free to drop me [a note](#) if you're so inclined. And have a happy (and safe) Halloween!

* * *

In other news, it's with heaviness in my heart that I say this month's Women in Gaming will be the last one. The Real World has been providing too many good-but-time-consuming opportunities for Emily Dresner-Thornber, and thus she needs to leave our little family.

I'm sad to see her go; she has been a professional delight to work with. She brought up matters that (in my mind) needed to be discussed, opened some eyes, and made some folks think . . . and did so in a consistently entertaining way, which is no small feat. We at *Pyramid* wish her all the best, and suspect that she'll attack and destroy whatever challenges lie before her . . . or talk to them, or do whatever women do to their challenges . Thanks, Em.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Underground RPG**, p. 3.

(Four stars) "An Alien Kicked Sand In My Face!

"Let's see: unbuttoned Kingston Trio shirt, check; blanket, check; board, check; board wax, check; crew-cut wax, check; sunglasses, check; best girl, yup; bulky radio, check . . . ."

Lost in the Twilight Zone

Halloween. It is undoubtedly *the* gamers' holiday. How can roleplayers not be excited about Halloween? Revelers wear costumes. Strangers hand out tiny chocolate bars. Orange marshmallow ghosts end up in microwaves as the butt of important scientific "experiments." The stars are right and small, red, plushy Cthulhus rampage and eat 1D3 trick-or-treaters per round. Grown men meander through barely-lit alleyways dressed like Sailor Moon.

Best of all, scary stories are told in the darkness of night. Terrifying tales are designed to strike fear to the core of the audience's being. *They* might control the horizontal and *they* might control the vertical, a friend whispers. "Do you want to see something *really* scary?" another friend asks with a hopeful look in his or her eyes.

Sure you do. It's Halloween.

The most frightening story of all, submitted for your approval --

The story of Scott Dicer, age twenty-seven. He lives in Anywhere, USA. His occupation: UNIX System Administrator for the local University and an avid roleplayer. He is presently enjoying a nice, sunny weekend while heading to his friendly local gaming store to pick up the newest *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition* source manual. He has looked forward to the release of this book for weeks, but this trip to the gaming store will be one of terror; his purchases -- fear; his destination -- the Twilight Zone.

Imagine a world subtly different from our own. Games are still games. Dice are still dice. Miniatures are still small. The gaming industry is no bigger than it is today, nor is it smaller: strangely, it's the exact same size. The friendly local gaming store is just as small as it ever was, and just as tightly crammed from floor to ceiling with roleplaying books and paraphernalia. Roleplaying is still a niche entertainment market.

Take the case of Scott Dicer as he walks through the door of the gaming store from our world to a strange one in search of the new *Dungeons and Dragons 3rd Edition Monster Manual*. He does not notice the new posters on the walls. He hardly recognizes the brands of the supplements on the display racks. He is single minded in his pursuit for his long awaited prize.

. . . Ah, there it is. He's been waiting for months. He's obsessively read every advertisement and every pre-review on the net. He picks up the book. He caresses it. He flips through it, looking for the biggest, nastiest creature within its covers. He gives a little squeal of delight when he lays eyes on the statistics for the dragons. He hardly notices the staggering increase in power for the succubus.

It is only then that he notices that the store is filled with women.

He looks up slowly. The cashier giving him a careful look-over is a woman. There are three noisy female gamers at the table at the back of the store. Two female gamers are arguing vehemently over the miniatures table. There is not a single guy in the entire store.

Scott Dicer finds this situation disturbingly odd. Many possibilities cross his mind. Could this be women's day at the gaming store? Could this be an initiative drive to get more women involved in the hobby?

Scott begins to feel nervous, because there are so many eyes on him. Something doesn't feel right. To busy himself and ponder this strange turn of events, he tucks the *Monster Manual* under his arm and picks through the new releases. He looks in the small racks tacked to the wall that are brightly advertised as the "Newest Releases!" The books look very much like the supplements Scott Dicer is familiar with: cyberpunk, pirates, space adventures. He recognizes *Blue Planet* and *SLA Industries*.

The new releases sit above a box labeled "$1 -- Take Several *Please*." The box is filled with marked-down *Girl Crazy* supplement packs from Decipher. Noticing this, Scott peers closer at the books, and subtle differences on the covers

begin to stand out. The artwork on the covers of the supplements displays women, fully clothed in bulky armor or protective vests, wielding well-balanced weapons. Men are shown as either partially naked or heavily armored, standing next to the women in action poses. There are no projectile breasts, no long stretches of legs, no tiny latex uniforms -- on the women. On the men, it's another story. On the men, there's flesh a'plenty.

Scott Dicer picks up the nearest *GURPS* supplement off the just released rack, the translation of Castle Falkenstein, and peers at the eye in the pyramid on the back cover. In bold letters at the bottom of the book are the words **Stephanie Jackson Games**.

Scott knows deep down in his gut that, much like an episode of *Star Trek*, he's stepped into an alternative universe. After reading and watching fantasy and science fiction for most of his life, he considers himself quite an expert on the subject of alternate universes. His entire life has been building to this moment.

Heart racing, he picks up gaming supplement after gaming supplement. The bylines have changed. The d20 supplement *Three Days to Kill* by Jennifer Tynes. Another d20 supplement, *Death in Freeport* by Christine Pramas. *Suppressed Transmission: The Second Broadcast* by Karen Hite. He reaches for the current issue of *Dragon*. It has an interview with Gail Gygax as the headlining article. A multi-page piece in the middle of the magazine deals with the problems of finding the proper costuming materials off the Web for pirate genre live-action games. Near the back of the magazine is a funny comic strip by Joan Kovalic about female gaming enthusiasts having trouble asking out their non-gaming boyfriends.

He dashes to the shelves of the regular roleplaying games, and pulls them down, one after another. He flips frantically through the pages. The names of the games are the same, and the content is similar, but it's skewed. There is more information on setting up complicated plots, character interactions, and political machinations with the occasional mention of a monster chewing on a careless adventurer. Conspiracies bump against costuming tips. Brave maidens in full plate armor fight off acid-dripping monsters in full color illustrations. Fully fleshed versions of live-action roleplaying games for nearly every single system are on the shelf. Games Scott would never have imagined have LARP versions: *Deadlands*, *Legends of the Five Rings*, even *FUDGE*. It is as if the LARPs have sprung up like weeds among the shelves of roleplaying games overnight. It's overkill.

What strikes Scott most of all is the similarity to his own realm of experience. Shelf after shelf, book after book, it all feels familiar. He's trapped in universe with a roleplaying industry for women, about women, written by women with advertising aimed at women. It's still the same roleplaying game industry he is used to with the same basic books, but it's all slanted toward a very specific niche market. The focus in these books is on strong women in perilous situations -- dangerous, edgy women who aren't going to take any garbage from any man, dealing with social problems of global consequence.

He kind of likes it.

This new gaming scene is certainly different, no doubting that. But is it *better* than it was before? Scott isn't sure. From the size of the store, there is clearly the same problem as on his own home world: gaming is a niche hobby. Here, it is slanted toward women. But, do *only* the women come and play? It doesn't matter if there are a million men and a thousand women in gaming or a million women and a thousand men, there's still only one million, one thousand people gaming overall.

Does it matter to be one of the minority when it is still *gaming* and it is still having fun?

The women are watching him. They're smiling in a friendly, "we've never seen your kind here" sort of way. It's almost as if they want to go for the throat.

While thrashing through the shelves of books, Scott Dicer had unconsciously wandered near the girls sitting at the back table. They are sitting around a pile of dice, character sheets, and source books. They're playing *Dungeons & Dragons*. They beam at him. They're friendly. They're open. They gesture toward the copy of the *Monster Manual* he's holding. They *want* him to game. They explain they have such problems meeting men who are interested in their hobby. One mentions that she keeps trying to get her boyfriend to sit down, but he says that he doesn't want to play

such "girly" games. He'd rather watch football and drink beer. Another mentions that it is so hard to meet someone of the opposite sex who is into the same things she is.

One girl leans forward. Her eyes are alight with an idea. She mentions she just read a few suggestions off a USENET group about getting men into gaming. She hastily adds Scott should try the new game *HUGE GUNS SHOOT STUFF*. It's based on the anime series of the same name, so it's not all *guy* oriented. There are some emotional situations involved "depending on the GM," but he might enjoy it, especially given his "Tastes as a Male." She explains this very slowly.

The other girls agree. Clearly *HUGE GUNS SHOOT STUFF* is the right game to get men enthusiastic about gaming. Another girl emphasizes, saying Steven Marsh wrote in his "Men in Gaming" column last week that all guys really want to do is run around in dungeons, kill things, and carry out treasure. It appeals to their nature to drink, hunt big horned things and hang stuffed heads on their walls.

One of the girls chips in and claims she doesn't believe that all men just want to hunt and kill things. She claims to have played with a group where half of the players were men and they like to *roleplay*. She insists that the men got just as much into gaming as the women. The other women don't believe her. They begin to argue.

Scott looks on with horror. He's riveted to the spot, listening to these girls chatter on about him as if he wasn't even there. They're speaking over his head about a gaming hobby that he's been involved in for years, and yet now he can't escape. It's no longer his hobby. It's now theirs.

With mounting terror, Scott makes his apologies and moves away from the table. In a rush, he makes his purchase of his forlorn *Monster Manual*, still clutched in his sweaty hands. His pulse races. His mouth feels dry and dusty. His stomach clenches. He hands his money over to the cashier, who is looking at him with a mixture of curiosity and boredom. He doesn't even bother to check his change.

Scott Dicer flees from the store. He stands on the sidewalk, panting in the sunlight. He has his purchase. He has his sanity. He looks up from the swirl of confusion to see a fellow gamer -- a refreshingly male gamer -- walking down the street at him. As Scott flashes a relieved smile, his friend says:

"Hey, Scott! Cool, you have the new *Monster Manual*! Are you playing in the *HUGE GUNS SHOOT STUFF* LARP this weekend? We're using Nerf this time . . ."

Scott Dicer, a normal gamer trapped in a strange world. This is a minor exercise in the care and feeding of a nightmare, with the hobby run only by women, played only by women, and participated in by only women. But it makes you wonder, in a different universe, what it might be like -- and if it really would be all that different. Scott Dicer knows. He can tell us what it is like to buy gaming supplements . . . in the Twilight Zone.

by McRey "Mac" Moyer

Art by Gary Washington and Colored by Keith Johnson

Screenshots by [ProFantasy](#)

It's the most celebrated tool of our time. You use it to read *Pyramid*. You use it to process and save your game notes and handouts. You print up character sheets with it, download and run automatic character generation programs, and you conduct your game research on the Web. You may even participate in roleplaying formats designed especially for it -- PbeM, MOOs, and MUSHes, to name a few. Isn't it about time you let your computer in on the fun of your tabletop roleplaying game?

Getting Organized: The Word Processor

Every campaign needs lists of certain types that need to be searchable and require constant additions and changes. Such lists are best kept as word processing documents, kept open throughout the game session.

The word processor makes these documents searchable (every word processor I've ever seen has a simple, decent search function); you can instantly add items with as much or as little detail as you need at the moment. Unlike a physical file, you can organize your lists however you like without losing the ability to search. And unlike an index card file you never crowd an entry by adding detail later.

There are loads of documents you'll want to have handy during your game, and you'll surely have documents unique to your campaign. The following, however, are the most obvious and universal.

- **NPC list:** A no-brainer; the computer multiplies the usefulness of an NPC list when you can search by name, race, class, eye color, pasta preference . . . the list is infinite.
- **Gazetteer:** Village names and roadside shrines in a fantasy game, planets in a space opera campaign, or night clubs and havens in your vampire game; a searchable list of places will always come in handy.
- **Session agenda:** It won't benefit from searchability and expandability the way other documents do, but the constant presence of a session agenda will help keep you on track.

A database might be more specialized than a word processing document for some kinds of lists, but in my opinion it's too cumbersome, and too difficult to establish and modify. In the end, you need searchability and expandability, not massive cross-referencing. So word processing docs, I think, are the way to go.

There and Back Again: Mapping Software

There's some excellent mapping software available, designed specifically for gamers. Several are linked from [Logicrucible's Crystal Ball](), but here are a couple of examples:

- **Campaign Cartographer.** Expensive, but it has several features that make it excellent for use at the tabletop. One of the best is its infinite zoom feature: details can be added at every level, so you can theoretically put building-by-building and even room-by-room maps of cities, dungeons, and castles on the same map as a broad world map. Or, better yet, hyperlink a city icon on the world map to a more detailed map of the city. Or hyperlink a system icon on a galaxy map to a detailed map of the planet orbits . . . and each of those to a detailed map of the lunar orbits. It's only available for Windows, and appears to be untested on Windows emulators under Macintosh and Linux.
- **Hexmap.** Again, only available for Windows, but it's easy to use, customizable with some difficulty, and designed to emulate the ever-popular hex paper. Best of all, this one's free.

Other Gaming Software

There's a lot of nice gaming software available, from customizable automated dice-rolling programs to specialized character generation programs, and an awful lot of it is cheap or free. Unfortunately, availability is somewhat patchy, depending on what game system you're using. Because designing, producing, and marketing software is quite an investment for game companies, a lot of the gaming software available right now is designed and distributed by the fan base. Much of it lacks the professional sheen of commercially released software. But if you search the Internet, you're going to find some real gems, programs being given away that a commercial software company would charge a fortune for.

A few notable gems:

- **Steve Jackson Games' Computer Aids.** Lots of great stuff here for many different games.
- **TableMaster.** Table-rolling software, bundled with lots of useful tables (and more are available). It's also easily customizable for anyone with the barest hint of programming experience (I took a class or two on BASIC in high school, and I can do it; and probably anyone could, with the instructions and examples) and completely compatible with any game. It's not free, but well worth the low price.
- **The Ever-Changing Book of Names**, or **EBON.** Randomly generated names for a variety of cultures. Includes programmability, with good documentation. The fully functional version requires registration, but the unregistered version is completely usable and pretty close to fully functional.
- **Characturge.** An excellent character generator for White Wolf games, and very customizable for house rules and personal taste. There's no price exactly, but the designer asks that you donate blood to the organization of your choice . . . something you ought to be doing anyway.

The Sound of Music: Using a Custom Soundtrack

The ability to select the music you want and organize it into play lists is an incredible feature of the computer at the gaming table. If you haven't discovered the convenience of MP3s, a compact format for saving music as data on your computer, you're in for a pleasant surprise.

You'll need at least a good MP3 player that's capable of creating play lists. [WinAmp]() is a popular choice, with all of the

Campaign Cartographer by Profantasy

Files

Screenshot [345K]

Fractal Terrains by Profantasy

Files

Screenshot [160K]

features you'll need at the gaming table, and equivalents are easy to find for Macintosh and Linux platforms.

You'll likely also want to turn your existing music into MP3s. MP3now has excellent instructions for doing just that, and makes available several CD "rippers," programs that convert music CD tracks into MP3 files.

Napster is a very powerful program for exchanging MP3 files with others on the Internet. However, you should be aware of the legal implications of duplicating music under copyright and storing it as data, and of possessing data thus stored by others.

Once you've established a collection of MP3s, you can sort the files into play lists for various purposes -- brooding music for mysterious moments; exciting, fast-paced music for chase scenes; loud, angry music for combat; and so on. You can also develop a sound track for each campaign, using music as a continuous thread to bind each session to the others. Best of all, you can blend your music in new ways. Campaign soundtracks that mix classical music and instrumental movie scores with postmodern rock or punk become easy. If you're willing to put in a bit of time, you can create custom blends with emotional ebbs and flows . . . with results far superior to the shuffle feature of your multi-disk CD player.

Things That Go Bump in the Night: Using Sound Effects

Requiring a bit more hands-on attention than an MP3 soundtrack, sound effects well selected can really pay off at the gaming table. Portray menacing growls, squeaky hinges, airplane and helicopter takeoffs and landings, gun battles, ominous thunder, and so many more with a click of your mouse. You can buy inexpensive CDs full of sound effects most places you buy music CDs, and you'll probably want to "rip" the tracks into MP3 or wave files as described above. Or download Windows desktop themes (www.themeworld.com is a good place to start) and you'll be loaded up with grouped wave files (*Star Wars* fans will be particularly well armed).

Unlike your soundtrack, sound effects don't fit neatly into play lists. I recommend placing all the sound effects you intend to use during the game clearly labeled in a directory (window) of their own, keeping your music player running, and starting the sound effects as needed. If you use a sound track, you'll want to experiment before the game to see how sound effects interact with the your MP3 player.

Wintertree Games' FXMaster for Windows was designed for the very purpose of managing sound effects at the gaming table. The registered version saves 150 wave file names (far more than I would ever use in one night of gaming). According to my tests, it can also play sounds right over the top of an MP3 player (WinAmp, anyway), which is a handy plus.

Crossing the Fourth Wall: The Computer as a Roleplaying Participant

How about getting the computer involved in the game itself, within the game world?
As a prop it makes an excellent . . . well, an excellent computer terminal. That hacker
NPC can type frantically, slam Ctrl+Alt+Del when things don't go her way,
gracefully type with one hand while sipping a Slushee. Perhaps the monitor can serve
more abstractly as the occasional magic mirror or crystal ball. Or maybe the computer
can even be a central object to your plot: a techno-fetish, the time-travelers' ultimate
reference guide, or repository for the dark contents of Hitler's brain.

Drop the occasional image or text handout onto a floppy disk in a modern or
futuristic campaign, and add that extra bit of physicality and suspense for your
players. The PCs have the MJ files (a disk in the hand is worth so much more than a
note on the character sheet), but they can't actually look at them until they get to a
computer . . . .

Or imagine the computer as a character in itself. This can be used to dark and

dehumanizing effect in many dystopian games, when The Computer orders about human pawns with cold efficiency. Or it can be used for suspenseful and mysterious effect, a la the old movie Whoopi Goldberg movie *Jumping Jack Flash*, as an important NPC speaks only through the computer -- perhaps a human spy, perhaps the avatar of a Virtual Adept, or perhaps a Glass Walker totem at the heart of an urban werewolf caern. Or perhaps its role can be truly horrifying, as Hal in 2001, in perfect amorality. And what better role for the computer than a robot in *Star Wars* or another science fiction setting?

Try using text-to-speech software to enhance the effect with a not-quite-human synthesized voice:

- [Bell Labs' Text-to-Speech Synthesis demo](#) is web-based, easy to use, and reasonably flexible. Voices are created as you enter them. Unless you save individual wave files for later use, it does require an active Internet connection, and takes at least several seconds to reply over a modem connection . . . unless you [buy the software](#).
- [ReadPlease](#) for Windows is free for the taking. It included four voices, two male and two female, which are all easy to understand and fairly expressive. Its type-and-play interface works well. Hit Ctrl+N to clear the screen between lines (it plays everything in its text window, not following the cursor), and keep an open text file handy to copy and paste pre-programmed lines.
- [WillowTALK](#) for Windows produces very distorted output that's difficult to understand (which may be an advantage or a disadvantage, depending on how you plan to use it), and its interface is a bit cluttered. But it does have a lot of voices, including some nifty robot voices with an intentionally tinny edge or lots of reverb ("RoboSoft Two" is perfect for space opera security robots, and "Wendy" is a raspy voice great for damaged robots), and a handy drop-down menu to switch between them.

Perhaps the ultimately ubiquitous computer role can only be fully realized in **Paranoia**, where the computer can play an all-powerful NPC ("The Computer is your friend! All hail The Computer!") and devilish co-gamemaster ("A dozen angry looking blues with wicked looking pistols charge . . . what's that? Of course, Friend Computer . . . I meant to say that several dozen blues pour into the corridor, each one armed with a medical bot . . .").

Remember R2 "speaking" in Aurabesh to Luke in his X-wing in *The Empire Strikes Back*? Many of the computer's roles can be made more effective if you have the resources to set up a local-area network with a clean-looking chat program, one terminal in the hands of the GM, and the other with the players. (Double your score if you recognize the word "Aurabesh;" triple if you have the font on your computer right now.)

(Editor's note: A search for 'Aurabesh' and 'font' from [Altavista](#) should set you up with a truetype version of this font.)

The Devil in the Details

Before your roleplaying session, you'll need to prepare a bit, to adapt your computer to this specialized use.

- Decide what documents and programs you'll want open during the session, and create a directory (a.k.a. window) with shortcuts to each of them.
- Decide what documents you want to keep handy, but won't necessarily need to be open at all times. Create another directory with shortcuts to those, and then put that directory within the first.
- Be sure that you have hard copies of any documents you can't live without, in case of technical difficulties. Chances are that you won't need them . . . but if you don't have them, Murphy's Law will assert itself and trash your hard drive. Consider it hard drive protection.
- Disable any sounds that your operating system plays automatically, error alerts and so on. They can be pretty disruptive (especially if you've set up that *Planet of the Apes* desktop theme).
- Set up the computer where you'll need it before your players arrive.

There are certainly a few pitfalls to using a computer at the tabletop, so watch out for them.

- As the game begins, open every program and document you'll need. You don't want to wait for each one to open during play.
- Position the monitor such that it won't hide you from any of your players, or them from you. Even though it's an exciting tool, you can't let the computer interfere with the real point of the game, having fun with your friends.
- Place the speakers and adjust the volume so that music won't be overwhelming to anyone.

When you've brought your computer to the gaming table, the next step is to judge its usefulness there objectively. You've got to give it a few sessions before you can tell if the newness makes it awkward (be patient, because it will be awkward the first time), or if it's really just not compatible with your style of play. You'll find some functions that work well for you, and some that don't. In the end, remember that the game's more important than the gadget. But you may well find the computer is a powerful tool to make the game run more smoothly, keep it organized, and maybe even make it livelier.

?

by Adam Wells

Art by Shea Ryan

"If elected, I promise to serve my Illuminated Masters with all the slavish devotion they demand of me. And I'm not just saying that because I fear being replaced with a clone."
--George "W." Bush

"I have no fear of being replaced with another clone."
---Dick Cheney

"Well, I may seem a little stiff, but I'm certainly not an android programmed to seize the presidency and use it to eliminate those who refuse to bow to the dominance of Those Who Must Not Be Named. No sirree."
--Al Gore

"There is absolutely NO REASON to rub mayonnaise in your armpits. Immanentize the eschaton! Thank you and fnord."
--Joe Lieberman, KSC

"BWAH HA HA! BWAH HA HA HA HA!"
--Pat Buchanan

* * *

It's that time again! Election time, when a handful of people will determine who will run the most powerful nation on earth for the next four years. It's almost too bad those people aren't the voters…

That's not to say your vote doesn't make a difference. In fact, voting is your opportunity to suck up to the Secret Masters. Some group of power-crazed madbeings will come out on top. Don't you want to be on their side when that happens?

Of course, it's not easy to decide which candidate is supported by which Illuminati, much less who will win. You can play *INWO* to model battles between the different factions, but, until now, it couldn't help you much with the election problem. Lucky for you, some of Them (for whatever inscrutable reason) have decided to pass along these rules and give you a vague idea of how presidential politics really work. Use the information wisely. But not too wisely. There are some things man was not meant to know.

Election Round INWO

This version of *INWO* uses all rules of standard *INWO* unless otherwise noted. The major difference is the addition of an "election round." During the election round, players nominate and elect a personality to be president, with all the perqs except the interns, until the next election round. They also learn valuable lessons about democracy and how to crush it before it becomes a nuisance.

Preparation

For **Election Round** *INWO*, I recommend that you remove all Groups with the "nation" attribute from play. Sure, arguably China voted in the last election, but let's not quibble. You could also remove non-American or "inappropriate" personalities, though many people would probably get a kick out of electing Count Dracula president. Make sure you include as many of the groups mentioned in these rules as possible, and a bunch of personalities. Media Sensations named after candidates are good, but making regular cards for them is better. There is already an Al Gore card, of course. You can add a George W. Bush card by clipping his picture from a magazine and gluing it onto his daddy's card. You could include their primary opponents, if you're big on simulating the whole election. McCain, Bradley, Forbes, Keyes, Buchanan? Who knows what sinister powers they wield? You could add former presidents as cards, even (supposedly) dead ones. Some have long felt that there should be a Nixon card, and, of course, most of the Founding Fathers were Illuminated.

Use a communal Group deck; if you're unfamiliar with those rules, see
http://www.sjgames.com/inwo/rules/variants/onebigdeck.html.

Finally, for the purposes of this variant, Bill Clinton has a 2 power and his only special ability is that he is Liberal 50% of the time.

The Election Round

At the end of each round of standard play, there is a round whose purpose is to elect a president. The election round consists of three parts -- nomination, naming of vice-presidential choices, and election. Plot cards that may be played at any time may be played normally during any part of the election round unless otherwise noted.

In the nomination segment, each player may nominate a personality in play (which includes those in the uncontrolled area) who will be a legal recipient of support in the election segment. A nominee need not be in the nominating player's power structure, and a single player may control any number of nominees. The players announce their nominations beginning with the controller of the current president and proceeding in standard turn order, until each Illuminati has had the opportunity to nominate once. If no player controls the president, nominate in regular turn order. Ross Perot and Lyndon LaRouche automatically nominate themselves, though they do not count as the nomination for a player controlling them.

Once the nominations are in, the Green Party, Libertarians, and International Communist Conspiracy may spend an action to throw their support behind any nomination, and thereby remove that nominee's opportunity to receive support in the election. All other nominees become "candidates." If no one makes a nomination, all personalities in play or in the uncontrolled area become legal candidates. If the three groups above eliminate all the nominees, any personalities on the table other than those "supported" become candidates. If there are no other personalities in play, the election round is skipped.

After the nominations are sorted out, the candidates must choose running mates. Every candidate must choose a vice-president, as long as there is at least one other personality in play or uncontrolled. The player controlling the candidate, not necessarily the player nominating him, chooses the VP. If the candidate is uncontrolled, the player nominating him chooses his second. (Perot and LaRouche, if they nominate themselves while uncontrolled, pick a VP randomly from among non-Government personalities.) Candidates announce their choice in order that they were nominated. There is no way to get out of a VP nomination. Any available personality may be chosen as VP, even other candidates, or

personalities previously supported out of nominations. The candidate and his running mate are now a "ticket."

When all candidates have VP choices, the election begins. Whichever ticket receives the "support" of the most power wins the election and becomes the president and vice-president. Declarations of support begin with the current president and proceed in standard turn order around the table. A Group, including an Illuminati, normally supports a ticket without using its action, simply adding its power to the total which that candidate has accumulated. A group may only support one ticket, once, and once the controlling player has announced its support, it may not be withdrawn or changed to a different ticket. Each player receives one opportunity to announce the support of his groups. A particular player may choose to divide the support of his groups between different tickets.

There are a few situations where a group may wish to spend its action in support. A media group may support any ticket normally, but if it spends its action, its support is doubled. (For example: Cable TV has a 3/2 power. If it does not spend an action, it may support a ticket with 3 power. If it spends an action, it is worth 6 power of support.) If the Democrats, Triliberal Commission, or Feminists spend an action when supporting a ticket, no Conservative group may thereafter support that ticket. If the Republicans, Fred Birch Society or the Religious Reich spend an action to support candidates, no Liberal group may thereafter support them. In order to gain the benefit of any plot card that temporarily increases power (e.g. Benefit Concert), the group involved must spend its action. A group may always support a ticket normally instead of using its action and attached special consequences. In fact, a group may support normally, and at a later time, use its action to add its additional power or special effects to that support. For example, your Feminists group could support a ticket on your turn, allow the next player to support, and then spend its action to make the candidates it supported ineligible for Conservative support on the third player's turn and beyond. The Eco-Guerrillas could support a hopeful pair on your turn, and at a later time spend their action and the plot card Benefit Concert to add 10 to the value of their support.

After all players have had their opportunity to declare support, the support of any groups in the uncontrolled area must be determined. Any uncontrolled personality who is part of one or more tickets will automatically support whichever of his tickets has the most support to this point. Any player who controls the Trading Card Games automatically decides the support of all other groups in the uncontrolled area, probably by subtle brainwashing in gaming magazine articles. Otherwise, the support of each group goes to the ticket that could mount the best unsupported attack to control on that group. For example, a ticket of Al Gore and Count Dracula could, between them, mount an attack of 13 effective power on the Anti-Nuclear Activists from Al Gore (Gore's 1 Power, +8 for direct control of Green, +4 Liberal in common), or on the Vampires from the Count (his 2 Power and +10 for direct control of the Vampires, Gore's 1 Global Power). No plots or groups outside the ticket may have any impact on this calculation (even with any attempt bonuses), nor is it in any way an actual attack. If two tickets have equal potential attacks, roll off to see which receives the support. Once a ticket is guaranteed victory, you don't really need to figure the rest of the support, unless the victor wants to work on his list of enemies.

If two or more tickets receive equal amounts of supporting power, the presidential candidate with the greatest personal power carries the election. If two or more tickets are still tied, then and only then, the winner shall be determined by a vote (see, I bet you're understanding the electoral process better already) among the players and anyone else who happens to be in the room at the time. Bring your friends! Claim that your dog is a longtime Democrat! And if the vote is a tie too, competitive roll off (which could be modified by appropriate plot or special ability; high roll wins) between the tied tickets will determine the victor. Sometimes it boils down to a crapshoot.

The Executive Branch

The newly-elected president gains the alignment Government and the following special abilities as though they were inherent to the card, until he ceases being president:

- Doubled Power.
- +3 on any attempt to control any Government group that is part of the US.

- +8 for direct control of any Government group.
- An additional control arrow (if the personality loses the presidency while using this extra control arrow, the puppet on the extra arrow is returned to the uncontrolled area).
- He may choose to gain all the special abilities of his vice-president, unless the veep is a Media Sensation. (Ex. if Al Gore is VP, the president receives a +8 to directly control any Green group. If Ross Perot were VP, the president could choose to automatically make his puppets Straight and Conservative.) Note that this is not on a case per case basis. The pres either takes the VP's ability or does not, and then maintains it until he is not president or he changes VPs.
- The real power behind the chief executive, however, is that only the player who controls him may play New World Order cards. In the event that there is no president controlled by a player, anyone may play such cards.

NWO cards may be removed by the use of other plot cards (e.g. Sweeping Reforms) normally.

The vice-president also gains the alignment Government. If the pres or VP were not Government before being elected, they will lose the alignment when they lose their office. If the president is destroyed and not immediately returned to play, or he resigns, or his position is removed for any reason (see below), the VP becomes president and may choose any personality in play or uncontrolled, other than a just-removed president, as his VP. But he may not use his action token for any reason as long as he is VP. The veep is immune to destruction by any means except assassinations. (I mean, he's already the VP.) He can only wish that he could resign. If the vice-president is killed or the position is removed, the president must choose some other personality in play or uncontrolled to become vice-president.

No personality may be elected president more than twice. If there is ever no president, the first personality to be drawn immediately becomes president upon being drawn. (Some possible reasons for this are the destruction of a president with no VP or the failure to conduct an election round due to lack of eligible candidates.) If there are no personalities in play except the president, the first one to be drawn becomes the VP.

The alignment and power gained do count towards any applicable goals while a personality is president, and if he is destroyed while president, he counts as a destroyed Government group, unless he is a Media Sensation. On the other hand, the vice-president may not be counted for any goal, even special goals, so long as he is VP or was destroyed while VP.

The plot Senate Investigating Committee may be used, at the player's option, to remove the president or vice-president from office instead of its normal use; ignore the first paragraph on the card if so used, though all other details of the card remain the same. It may be played at any time except during the election round in this manner. It may only be used in one capacity or the other each time it is used, but may be used in different ways in the same game. The card itself may still be used on any player only once per game, regardless of which way it is used.

Options

Probably because of the limited time until the election, a mysterious man in a black trench coat has handed me an unmarked envelope with some quicker options. But don't blame me if They want to know why you cut corners.

Last One in the White House Wins INWO

This is exactly like Election Round *INWO*, except that the game lasts only a predetermined number of turns (four is recommended), and the only way to win is by controlling the president at the end of the last election round. Whoever controls the VP at that point is definitely the loser. No goal or special goal allows victory. Otherwise, all *INWO* and Election Round rules apply.

The VP Is Eyeing Me Hungrily INWO

This is the same as Last One in the White House Wins *INWO*, except that there is one more round of play after the last election round, starting with the player controlling the president and proceeding in whatever order he desires. In this

way, it may skip around the table, though each player must get one turn. Any player who controls the VP may refuse to take this last turn when called upon, forcing the pres to pick someone else, unless he is the last player available. The vice-president always strikes last . . .

Even More Cynical About Democracy INWO

Don't like the election round at all? Instead, use a plot card that can be linked to a personality to make him president and give him the presidential powers. (Make it with a blank card, or mark a different plot card to represent it.) This "Elected President" plot may be played only during your turn, and requires the action of the current pres or the personality to be "elected," an Illuminati action, and either Media action(s) of 8 or more power or the action of the Democrats or the Republicans. No more than one such plot may be in play at any time. As soon as it is played, any other "Elected" plot in play is discarded, and the powers of the president pass to the personality newly linked. The president must still have a VP as long as at least one other personality is in play or uncontrolled, and that unfortunate suffers the regular restrictions. If the pres stops being president or alive, the link is passed to the VP, not discarded.

In all seriousness, if you can vote, you should vote.

Pyramid Pick

Letter Head

Published by [Atlas Games](#)

Designed by Kristan Lawson and Herbert R. Lawson

124 cards; $19.95 U.S.

"Today's word is ACNE," David said. He spread the cards out in front of them. The "A" and the "C" stared up at the other players, but the last two letters were face-down.

Jody looked at the bright red L-shaped hair of the guy on the backs of the cards. It was the final round, and David hadn't lied once in the forty-five minutes it had taken them to get this far. Something felt fishy, though.

He studied David's eyes. David did his best not to look shifty.

"Challenge," Jody said. Deb followed his lead; Paul didn't. Paul was quiet that way. He was also 50 points behind.

David slowly turned over the hidden cards. He had the N -- but a Z was hiding where the E should have been. He shook his head ruefully. "Thirty points down the drain," he muttered.

Jody said, "It's all in the bluffing." He certainly hoped it was. The best word in his hand was DIVOT, and the only way he could score enough points to win was by convincing the others he was lying . . .

* * *

Letter Head looks like "*Scrabble* with cards." You have a hand of cards and you spell words with them, scoring points depending on how rare each letter is and how long the word is. The cards themselves are well-designed, durable and easy to shuffle, but there's no art or visual surprises.

That's okay. *Letter Head* doesn't need eye candy -- the parts are simple, but the game is great.

Like Scrabble tiles, each card represents a single letter. Vowels are common and worth only one or two points, but the single "Z" card is worth 25 points. You can have between five and ten cards in your hand, and you use these to spell one word in each of the game's five rounds.

So far, there's nothing new. The twist that completely changes the game is that you can lie about what cards you're using.

Don't have an "E" to spell "HOTEL"? Use a "J" instead. Sometimes you will want to use that "J" even if you do have an "E", because you might be able to score more points that way.

Of course, you'll have to sneak this misspelling past the other players. *Letter Head* lets you put any or all of your letters out face-down when you spell your word. You tell them what you're spelling, and they have to decide if your cards are what you say they are.

If your opponents don't challenge you, you can sneak that "J" past them and rake in the points. If they think you're lying and you're not, you score extra points. But if they catch you pulling a fast one, each opponent that challenged you gets points and you lose your turn.

Thanks to the bluffing rules, you can score even if you have a terrible hand -- but you have to be sneaky to do it. In fact, you have to be sneaky all the time. Every play depends on how suspicious your opponents are and how suspicious you can make them be. You want them to believe you when you're lying, and challenge you when you're telling the truth.

The balance is almost perfect. Social skills are slightly more important than vocabulary skills, but you need both to play well. Like poker, you have to be able to put the cards together in useful combinations while figuring out what your opponents are really doing. (In fact, *Letter Head* comes with rules for fourteen other word games, several of which are poker variants.)

Group dynamics are crucial, especially in larger groups. It only takes one person to initiate a challenge, so you have to be much more careful about bluffing when playing with six to eight players. On the other hand, you can score even more points by convincing five or six players to pile onto a challenge when you're telling the truth.

The basic strategies remain the same whether you're playing with the minimum of three people or the maximum of eight, but you have to make adjustments for every combination of players. That's exceptionally good game design.

Game balance isn't the only bit of good design peeking out of this game. Since it only lasts five rounds, even an eight-player game is over in about an hour. Smaller games are shorter, and because you can draw cards at any time -- no waiting your turn here! -- you almost never have to sit around and wait while somebody thinks.

Letter Head has all the earmarks of a classic adult card game. It's fast, it's easy, and its strategies shift with the people you play with. Atlas Games has hit another home run here -- let's hope that *Letter Head* enjoys the same success as *Once Upon a Time* and *Lunch Money*.

--Chris Aylott

Pyramid Review

Blue Planet RPG 2nd Edition Player and Moderator's Guides

Published by [Fantasy Flight Games](#)

Written by various authors / [Biohazard Games](#)

Two 256 page books, hardbound; $27.95 each.

For those who don't know, *Blue Planet* is a hard science fiction roleplaying game released several years ago in softcover by Biohazard Games and supported by two supplements, *Archipelago* and *Access Denied*. After a recent agreement with Fantasy Flight Games, Biohazard has re-released the contents of the core rulebook and *Archipelago* in two nicely hardbound books, split into a *Player's* and a *Moderator's Guide*. The 2nd edition of the game also replaces the rules system of the 1st edition and adds a small amount of new information.

The main draw of *Blue Planet* continues to be its superb setting. The game concentrates on Poseidon, a waterworld very similar to Earth. The planet was colonized by a United Nations effort after a wormhole connecting it to Earth was discovered. However, after a vanguard colony was established, Earth suddenly faced a horrible plague called the Blight, which eventually killed over half the world's population, before being controlled by the concentrated efforts of the new world government, the G.E.O. Further colonizing of Poseidon stopped for over 75 years, and the colonists adopted a low-tech lifestyle to survive. When recontact finally came, a gold rush ensued, as newcomers struggled to escape devastated Earth and maybe make a quick buck, usually at the expense of the now natives. *Blue Planet* is set in the resulting confusion.

The world of Poseidon is ripe with roles and adventures for characters to take on. Countless factions attempt to influence the future of Poseidon: the Incorporate, companies almost as powerful as nations, want to exploit it; the Natives and perhaps the mysterious Aborigines, reclusive aliens that seem sentient, want to protect it; the G.E.O. wants to rule it; and ordinary people just want to survive it. Any of these groups can be used by a GM as enemies, allies, or employers to provide characters with a reason to adventure.

The 2nd edition of *Blue Planet* adds information about the Aborigine and Native groups to the *Moderator's Guide*, as well as a dribble of new technology to the *Player's Guide*. While this information fleshes out those factions, but is by no means crucial to GMs who own the 1st edition. In addition, several pieces from Undercurrents, a newsletter that supports the game, seem to have made their way into the new version. However, the most important change by far in the 2nd edition is the new rules system.

The 2nd edition rules system is a major improvement over the cumbersome and confusing 1st edition rules. Unlike the percentile-based 1st edition, the basic dice mechanic for 2nd edition involves taking the lowest roll from a dice pool of between one and three ten-siders and comparing it against a target number of the total of character's skill and attribute plus modifiers. A roll less than the target number succeeds. This mechanic works well and is used throughout the game.

Other than the new dice mechanic, the best part of the new system is character creation. Using a series of overlaid templates, players progress up a character from childhood through a professional career. Custom points allow the

player to tweak the character to their taste. Following Biohazard's belief that not all people are created equal, the game allows three power levels, Everyday, Exceptional, and Elite, to satisfy a variety of games. The only downfall of character creation is that it is rather slow, although not excessively.

Otherwise, there are a few flaws in the new rules. The combat rules, while quite lethal and realistic, require numerous dice rolls and special cases that other games often manage to streamline. Also, several small details, such as vehicles that lack the range to operate on Poseidon's vast oceans, still haven't been fixed. However, overall the rules system models the setting well, and though it isn't perfect, it definitely is acceptable.

All of this information is contained in the two book format set by *Dungeons & Dragons*: the *Player's Guide* contains the rules and general setting information, while the *Moderator's Guide* contains the descriptions of specific islands found in *Archipelago* along with the GM only information from the core rulebook from 1st edition. The production values for the new books have increased as well, with easier to read type and many new interior illustrations. Unfortunately, Biohazard has abandoned the old photorealistic cover illustrations for drawings that, while pretty, lack the wow-factor of the first edition photos. In general though, the new books are aesthetically comparable to books from the larger roleplaying companies.

Whether or not *Blue Planet* 2nd Edition is worth your gaming dollar depends on your situation. For owners of 1st edition and *Archipelago*, the main attraction of the new edition will be the new rules and production values. If you already use a different system, it may not be worth your money. For owners of only the core rulebook, most of the *Moderator's Guide* will be new, and well-written at that. Gamers with an interest in science fiction should also buy this RPG -- its an excellent hard sci-fi setting and the new version is definitely an improvement. For the general roleplayer, it's still a good game if you can spare the cash, but not a must-buy. All in all, the new edition exhibits all the good qualities of the game and fixes most of its flaws. Go on, take the plunge into *Blue Planet*.

-- Andy Wills

Pyramid Review

The Way of the Wolf (for L5R RPG)

Written by Rich Wulf and Shawn Carman

Published by [AEG](#)

$19.95; 128 pages

The tenth book in "The Way of the Clans" series follows the formula from previous books down to the last detail. Staring off with a short story, then into numerous little tales about Ronin in Chapter One, to history in Chapter Two, character creation in Chapter Three, NPCs in Chapter Four, Character Templates in Five, and an appendix full of useful stuff. Each chapter is separated by a full page illustration, and AEG's use of sidebars continues unabated.

The good news is that while the format may be standard, Ronin, by their very nature are not. The different tales about Ronin in Chapter One give the GM a good idea of the numerous types of origins Ronin can have. Retired Samurai, Samurai out to test themselves, fallen Samurai, children of fallen Samurai, and farmers who want to be Samurai all move about under the broad title of Ronin.

More important than individual Ronin tales, Chapter Two gives the GM and players specific examples that give more information under different headings. For example, under Dishonored Samurai, the reader learns that it is, in the eyes of Rokugan, a harsher punishment to be denied seppuku and cast out then to be allowed to kill oneself. Outside of more general history, there are employment listings, such as advisors, priests, bandits, and player's favorite, mercenaries. Legends recount different tales that show Ronin are not all honorless. The sidebars here are used to good effect, with different NPC backgrounds listed without stats. This is perfect for the GM who doesn't want his players knowing everything about the NPCS.

Another important part of Chapter Two is the Ronin Organizations. Most players will fight Yugoro's Hordes, a group of juzimai (gangs) that follow one bandit, or search out work in the City of the Rich Frog, or mentors in the city of Nanashi, or fight alongside the fallen Toturi, a.k.a. the Black Lion, a.k.a. the Black Ronin. Those seeking information on the Kolat will get a little, but not enough to discourage players from buying the book. Last but not least, Bloodspeakers are given their own section. Unlike many in Rogukan, the servants of Iuchiban always have a place for angry Samurai. Each section includes notes on how the organization reacts to other Ronin organizations, as well as brief history and physical location. At this part of Chapter Two, the idea of Ronin Schools is brought into play.

Other information in Chapter Two includes Ronin Shugenja, The Yotsu Family (a specific example of a Ronin Family becoming Samurai), and ends with Famous Battles. GMs will read about how Ronin have influenced important events like The Battle At White Stag and the Battle of the Cresting Wave, both very established events in Rogukan history.

Players will eagerly devour Chapter Three. Who doesn't want new skills, advantages and disadvantages? Provincial Hero allows the Ronin some clout in a small area, while Personal Mon allows the Ronin to have his own symbol. The Bounty disadvantage gives players a variable number of points depending on how high the bounty is and what crime the character is accused of, while Heimin is a Ronin without Samurai ancestry, a big crime in the eyes of Rogukan.

While Chapter Four includes Ronin of all kinds, the two most famous, Ginawa, and Dairya, only have their backgrounds updated. Why? Why not just a reference to *Unexpected Allies* for more information? Outside of that, there are numerous other Ronin whose backgrounds link them to Toturi, like Mikio, Dairya, Hasame, Toku, and Shotai. There is a high point Ronin army for Clan Wars, but doesn't really help the GM looking for variety in his NPCs. A few others like Seou and Seiki Yotsu, show where the accepted Ronin family is now, one a Samurai, the other a Shugenja.

Chapter Five is useful for new players or GMs needing more quick characters with templates like Retired Vassal, Ashigaru Fraud, Lost Heir, Wandering Duelist (not the same template from Winter Court Kyuden Kakita), Wave-Man Assassin, and Wandering Komuso, or Monk.

The Appendixes cover not only how to survive as a Wave Man, but how the other Clans react to Ronin, how to use Ronin in the campaign, recent developments, information on Scorpion and Akoko Ronin, new spells, magic items, villages and an example village, Nanashi Mura, with map and encounter locations. The book ends with not one, but two character sheets!

The Way of the Wolf, along with the *Minor Clans*, can produce some of the more interesting and memorable characters in a *Legend of the Five Rings* and this book succeeds in making them not only more viable as a character type, but more capable of surviving among their peers.

-- Joe G. Kushner

I Shoot The Body Electric

"In living things, we see the signals of the inner state of the organism reflected in the brightness, dimness, and color of the flares. The inner life activities of the human being are written in these 'light' hieroglyphs. We've created an apparatus to write these hieroglyphs. But to read them, we're going to need help."
-- Semyon and Valentina Kirlian

Take a picture, they say, it'll last longer. That's especially true (using the term with our traditional laxity) of the paranormal; without blurry photographs of everything from Bigfoot to triangular UFOs, we'd barely have a hook to hang a scenario on. What we need, then, is a superior method of pseudoscientific photography, one that combines Tesla, chakras, the KGB, and anything else our little hearts desire. Fortunately, the vasty deeps of Communist claptrap provide just such a mechanism for us all, through the miracle of Kirlian photography. So lure your player characters into high-frequency electrical fields, twiddle those top-line Soviet-vintage Bakelite dials, and say "cheese." Just be sure to pronounce it "Kirlian."

"I studied the picture with pain, excitement, and hope all combined. Did I have a discovery? An invention? It wasn't clear yet."
-- Semyon Kirlian

It all began in 1937 (or, according to other sources, 1939), when Armenian electrician Semyon Davidovitch Kirlian noticed a powerful spark-gap discharge from a medical diathermy machine in a hospital in Krasnodar, Russia. Being a creative sort, he wondered if he could photograph such a discharge, and being a handy sort, he soon whomped up an apparatus to allow him to do just that. By placing anything onto a photographic plate (or on photographic paper) inside a high-frequency, high-voltage current (with a very low amperage to avoid frying the subject), he was able to generate a glowing "airflow" discharge that transferred itself to the photograph. Tinkering with the apparatus, they took "Kirlian photographs" of leaves, fingertips, small animals, and anything else they could find around the lab. The Kirlians became convinced that they'd photographed the "bioplasmic field" or, in occultist terms, the "aura." In 1961, the Kirlians wrote up their results in a scientific paper, with the result that the Soviet (and Czechoslovakian) medical and technical establishments launched a massive investigation of the phenomenon. Scriptwriter turned LSD booster turned UCLA parapsychologist Thelma Moss popularized Kirlian techniques in the U.S. beginning in the early 1970s, and Kirlian "aura diagnosis" became a much-touted buttress of New Age medicine and therapy.

The Kirlians, sad to say, did not actually invent "Kirlian photography," or even discover the phenomenon (or pseudophenomenon) of the Kirlian aura. In 1777, German physicist Georg Christof Lichtenberg discovered that discharging a high voltage current into a resin created a starlike dust pattern -- a "Kirlian sand-painting," if you will. In 1852, Baron Karl von Reichenbach discovered a mysterious glow from many animals and plants, which he considered the visible sign of the "Odic force" within all life, a notion Wilhelm Reich would revive a century later as the "orgone." Nikola Tesla often photographed himself standing within his high-voltage Tesla coil, emitting a nimbus of electricity. It's not at all unlikely that the diathermy machine which initially inpsired Kirlian was one of those invented by Tesla in 1897. Two years later, one Rochas d'Aiglun actually invented the Kirlian process, photographic paper and all. In 1903, French physicist René Blondlot created a ruckus over invisible "N rays" emitted by certain metals; over 100 experiments independently confirmed this cousin of the Kirlian aura before being junked. In 1911, London doctor Walter Kilner developed a technique for viewing the "etheric body" through a dye-filter. Two Czech experimenters also independently developed the Kirlian process in 1939.

"Our special optical apparatus gave us more trouble than anything else we've invented. It would be hard to imagine a more capricious instrument. It had to be tuned in three ways, the optical lenses, the tension, and the high-frequency discharge. The success of the demonstration depended entirely on proficiency and practice. It was impossible not to get nervous with it."
-- Semyon and Valentina Kirlian

Sadly, of course, it's all down to wet fingers. The prime determinant for the type and color of a Kirlian discharge turns out to be how sweaty or greasy your hands are when the picture gets taken. (Some very patient investigators at Drexel

University did the groundwork on this stuff in the 1970s.) Even Kirlian's early experiments detected a notable difference between Kirlian photos of inebriated and sober subjects. (Kirlian might also have become suspicious when inorganic sponges soaked in saline solution also gave full, vibrant "aura photographs" under his process.) Kirlian energies don't manifest in a vaccuum, which also argues against a psychic aura and for an atmospherically-conducted coronal discharge of the same type seen in St. Elmo's Fire. The famous "phantom leaf" photos by Thelma Moss are almost certainly photos of residue left on the plate from previous leaf photographs, and the generally balky and sensitive nature of even a properly-designed Kirlian apparatus means that its "aura photographs" will vary immensely thanks to tiny changes in atmospheric conditions.

"Thanks to the Kirlian discovery, bioplasmic energy can be seen by anyone in photographs and electron microscopes. It can be scientifically observed and studied as it swirls in sparkling flares of color. Twentieth-century scientists, with their tracking and charting devices, lifted the atom of the ancient Greeks out of the realm of philosophy and into the realm of the actual, making it a practical energy. Perhaps the Soviets starting with the Kirlian apparatus will do the same for the vital energy of ancient cultures."
-- Sheila Ostrander and Lynn Schrader, *Psychic Discoveries Behind the Iron Curtain*

Or so says the coverup conspiracy, anyway. It's obvious to even (or especially) the most blinkered researcher that the medical establishment hates and fears Kirlian techniques, which can diagnose diseases both physical and emotional before they appear in any conventional screenings. Kirlian technology helps track the flow of chi for acupuncture, or prana for Tantric magic. Kirlian photography can spot powerful psychics -- Thelma Moss' three sessions with Uri Geller demonstrated just the kinds of results she expected. "Skeptical" Kirlianists say the process photographs a coronal discharge, but one that is sensitive to psychic disturbances and medical states. Proper gung-ho Kirlianists say they photograph the actual astral body, emerging from the corporeal one like the Sun's corona from behind the moon during an eclipse.

Kirlian techniques can have applications far beyond the medical or therapeutic, in the proper hands. If they truly detect an astral body, surely a properly rigged setup would detect ghosts or astrally-projecting magicians in sensitive areas. Kirlian photography could detect lingering psychic traces useful in everything from criminal investigation (in proper *Millennium* style) to psychic archaeology. A Kirlian field could detect ships using Philadelphia Experiment technology, or the invisible unfortunates created by it. Similarly, one could hypothesize a Kirlian "wind tunnel" in which various devices or runes or wards could be tested for magic resistance -- this might even lead to magical (or psionic, or both) Stealth (or hyper-reflective "chaff") designs suitable for tinfoil hats, Reptoid cylinders, UN helicopters, and black suit-coats alike.

But that sounds like a lot of hard work. Simply using off-the-shelf technology, you can easily add the word "Kirlian" to any other kind of sensing for that special flair: for example, "Kirlian earth-penetrating tomography" helps find those hidden temples under the Sphinx or the network of subterranean tunnels connecting El Dorado and Area 51. Does the HAARP projector set up a hyper-energetic diffraction pattern in the troposphere, enabling "Kirlian astronomy" to detect Planet X? Should you feel the need, assume that forty years of top-secret Soviet research (or MJ-12 reverse-engineering of stolen Kirlian systems) have developed "Kirlian" lenses that use other energetic fields rather than electricity: a Kirlian-neutrino camera on the KH-23 satellite could spot powerful psychics (or magical artifacts, or Lost Cities focusing sacred-geometric feng shui) from orbit.

"It seems to be a fact that there are natural flames which at times visibly encircle the human head, and that also from a man's whole person fire may on occasion radiate naturally, not however like a flame which streams upwards, but rather in the form of sparks which are given off all around; further, that some people become resplendent with a blaze of light, though this is not inherent in themselves, but attaches rather to their clothes, or to the staff or to the spear which they are carrying."
-- Pope Benedict XIV, *De beatificatione*

Of course some folks always knew what to call mysterious coronal discharges from the human form -- halos. The hagiologies are full of saints who emitted glows under spiritual impulsion, from St. Lidwinna to St. Francis of Assisi, to St. Philip Neri. The discharge from the Ark that killed the blasphemer, the flash of light that created the "photographic negative" on the Shroud of Turin, and many other miracles no doubt draw on the numinous Kirlian

energies of divine power. Perhaps the Vatican's Kirlian devices date back to the same [ancient astronautic](#) crash that left the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Grail behind; or perhaps they simply use Czechoslovakian-surplus Kirlian scanners, slaved to the [Ernetti Chronovisor](#), tuning in powerful spiritual emanations from the distant past.

"Within twenty-four hours that machine near the table will generate waves acting on unrecognized sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges. Those waves will open up to us many vistas unknown to man, and several unknown to anything we consider organic life. We shall see that at which dogs howl in the dark, and at which cats prick up their ears after midnight."
-- Crawford Tillinghast, in "From Beyond," by H.P. Lovecraft

On the other hand, maybe there's a reason that people around the world instinctively know that photographs steal your soul. Perhaps Kirlian photography not only opens our eyes to outside forces, but allows them to look back at us through the pitiless lens. Once you've left your aura's imprint on the photographic plate, the implications for sympathetic (or down right unsympathetic) magic should chill the blood of the cheeriest New Ager. What good is it to develop a Kirlian videocamera that lets you see the egregors, or the poltergeists, or the [Rods](#), if it means that They can now see you? As centuries of pulp novels and late-night Christian broadcasting have taught us, anything we don't understand can be used for the purposes of Evil. No doubt the fiendish Nazi Ahnenerbe dug up Reichenbach's Odic research and tied it in with captured Kirlian technology to release the inherent vril in the [Amber Room](#) and transform it into a gateway between worlds, through the vibratory barriers and into the Mauve Zone inhabited by [green-gloved tulpas](#) and non-Euclidean monstrosities. It's up to your PCs to stop them, or those Kirlian satellites can only document the disintegrating aura of the Earth as ozone depletion, algal blooms, and mass extinctions race each other to a photo finish.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

$?$

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

$?$

Murphy's Rules

$?$

by Sean Robson

Art by Dan Smith

Gulach staggered to the top of the dune and saw nothing but an unending sea of dunes extending to the horizon. He choked out a wheezing laugh -- as much as his parched throat would allow. He had entered the Great Desert on a fool's quest, and he would die here. An ordinary man would have died long ago, but Gulach was not a man, he was a half-breed bastard -- too stupid to quit and too stubborn to die. He stumbled on, each step an effort of sheer will under the relentless hammer and anvil of the blazing sun and desert floor.

He had heard rumors of the Daga-Shai while living as a pit-fighter in Megalos. The Daga-Shai were said to be a secret society of assassins, all of them Half-Orcs like him. It was whispered that they lived in a lost city in the Great Desert, and moreover, that they offered naraghash -- sanctuary -- to any Half-Orc with the will to seek them out. The tales struck a chord in Gulach's soul. Never in his life had he known family or community. His only acceptance was the roar of the crowd for spilling and shedding blood to amuse Megalos's wealthy citizens.

They said he wouldn't last three days in the desert, that he would never find his sanctuary, if it even existed. Gulach didn't care. He would rather die in the desert dreaming of sanctuary than continue to live without hope. He stumbled and fell face first into the sand, and knew he lacked the strength to rise again. As he stared into the face of the late afternoon sun, clawing weakly at the sand, four tan cloaked silhouettes rose up, seemingly out of the desert, before him. One of the figures grabbed Gulach by the hair, bent his head back and placed a gleaming knife blade at his throat. "What do you seek?" whispered the veiled figure.

"Sanctuary," Gulach croaked.

Gulach's head was released and he was lifted to his feet. The leader of the four gestured to a stone walled city in the distance. "Welcome brother," he said, "to the city of Naraghash."

History of the Daga-Shai

In the year 1929 a band of Half-Orc slaves fled from the Spleen-Eater tribe in the Orclands. Knowing they would fair no better in Caithness, they escaped into the wastes of the Great Desert. Led by Goresh Lekh, the strongest and wisest among them, they learned the ways of the desert - how to find water and food. After many months of nomadic existence, they came upon the crumbling ruins of an ancient city. Where most of the band saw ruin and decay, Goresh Lekh saw the future. They settled in those ruins and slowly began to reclaim the city from the desert. As the women began to bear children, and more refugees from the Orclands found their way to them, the community grew and they finally had what they always dreamed of -- a home. They named their home Naraghash, Orcish for sanctuary.

Goresh Lekh knew that, for their society to survive, they must have commerce. In the resource-poor desert all they had to trade was their skill, and the skill they were best at was killing. And so the Daga-Shai -- the "night-shadows" --

were born. Goresh Lekh was born in Sahud and raised for a time by his human uncle who taught him to fight. After his uncle's death, Goresh Lekh was driven from Sahud and into the Orclands, but he never forgot the lessons of his childhood. In training the Daga-Shai, he refined and modified his Sahudese fighting techniques, blending them with the fighting style and weaponry the Half-Orcs were familiar with.

Under Goresh Lekh's tutelage, the Daga-Shai became peerless assassins. Their services were in demand in Megalos, and fetched a high price. As the Daga-Shai's reputation grew so did their ranks, as more and more Half-Orc refugees sought them out.

Politics

The Master of Daga-Shai is the leader of the society, and is known as The Goresh in honor of their founder. Under The Goresh a council of elders govern the city of Naraghash, leaving The Goresh to oversee the business and training of the Daga-Shai. Although the Daga-Shai society is largely secular, The Goresh is the closest thing they have to a holy man. His wisdom and authority are unquestioned.

When the Goresh dies, the most senior and experienced of the Daga-Shai assassins is chosen by the council of elders to replace him. If there is more than one eligible candidate, the issue is settled by sending the contenders to the Master's Alley, a convoluted maze of ruins. There the contenders stalk and ambush one another until all but one are eliminated. The survivor is named Goresh. There can be only one Master of Daga-Shai.

The only other sentient race living in the desert are the Reptile Men. The two races live in relative harmony, each preferring to avoid the other. In the early years of its settlement, Naraghash was occasionally attacked by Reptile Men, who feared the Half-Orcs were encroaching on their territory. Since the city walls were the first structures rebuilt by the settlers, the attacks met with little success, and as soon as the Reptile Men realized that the Daga-Shai wished only to live within the confines of their city and be left alone, the attacks stopped. On occasion the Daga-Shai trade steel to the Lizard Men in exchange for artifacts.

Many Daga-Shai, especially those born outside of Naraghash, harbor a deep resentment toward Orcs or Humans, depending on where they were raised, and many take great satisfaction in avenging themselves upon their former oppressors. The Goresh has strictly forbidden the indiscriminate slaughter of Humans, as it would damage the professional reputation of the Daga-Shai. Orcs, however, are a different story, as they seldom employ the services of the assassins. The Daga-Shai frequently conduct field exercises in the Orclands, as the area provides a limitless supply of training subjects on which to hone their skills.

Culture

The Daga-Shai live in a communal society. All resources are shared equally, and citizens are assigned living quarters with the city. All citizens work for the betterment of the whole, and it is considered the highest honor to serve as an assassin and help provide for the community. Half-Orc refugees are welcome in Naraghash, but are expected to train as Daga-Shai and help provide for the community if they wish to stay. Women are allowed to serve as assassins if they desire, but if they become pregnant they are expected to return to Naraghash to bear their children and nurse them through infancy. Children aged two to ten are raised communally, and are given the run of the city and allowed to enjoy their childhood. All children in Naraghash, boys and girls, begin training as Daga-Shai at the age of ten, and enter service as trained assassins at age seventeen. At present there are approximately three hundred citizens living in Naraghash, and over one hundred and fifty assassins abroad.

At least one Daga-Shai is stationed in every major city on Yrth to take freelance assignments. A small percentage of the Daga-Shai's fee is kicked back to the local

assassin's guild to avoid misunderstandings. Most guilds are happy to accept this
arrangement since the Daga-Shai's contract fee is so high he doesn't really take
much work away from the local talent, and eliminating a Daga-Shai is costly in terms of lost manpower. Freelance
Daga-Shai spend two years at each posting. After being relieved, they return to Naraghash for a period of rest before
being reassigned. Eventually, due to injury or age, an assassin will be forced to leave active service and retire to
Naraghash. There, they continue to serve their people by performing less hazardous duties. Some take up a trade, while
the best become Daga-Shai trainers.

Occasionally, The Goresh will accept a contract putting the Daga-Shai on long term retainer to a powerful individual
or organization to serve as personal assassins and body guards -- who better to protect someone from assassination
than a professional assassin? It is the responsibility of The Goresh to ensure that there are enough assassins available
to meet the Daga-Shai's contractual obligations.

The laws of Naraghash are designed to protect and preserve its citizens and are strictly enforced. The Prime Edict of
the Daga-Shai is to preserve the secrecy of the city. Goresh Lekh realized that if the location of Naraghash were
learned, or even the truth of its existence confirmed by the outside world, the new homeland would be destroyed.
Daga-Shai are expected to take their own lives before revealing the city's location. Anyone who does reveal the
location is hunted down and killed, along with those he told. To prevent accidental discovery, Sentinels patrol the
desert around Naraghash, killing all but Half-Orcs seeking sanctuary.

One of the most striking features of Daga-Shai society is their unshakable solidarity. The citizens of Naraghash are
exceptionally loyal to The Goresh, and to each other. Theft is unheard of in Naraghash, and the incidences of betrayal
have been few. Disputes are settled by a formal duel. For many Half-Orcs, the feeling of brotherhood and acceptance
they find with the Daga-Shai instills fanatical devotion.

Code of the Daga-Shai

The Daga-Shai live by a strict code of personal and professional conduct: once coin is taken, a contract must be
fulfilled, personal disputes are to be settled in a fair duel, die before revealing the location of Naraghash.

Half-Orc Racial Template (from GURPS Fantasy Folk)   Cost: 0 points

Attributes: IQ-1 [-10], HT +1 [10]
Advantages: Extra Hit Points +1 [5], Acute Hearing +2 [4]
Disadvantages: Reputation -2 [-10]
Skills: Brawling (P/E) DX [1]

Daga-Shai Assassin Template   Cost: 100 points

Attributes: ST 11 [10], DX 13 [30], IQ 11 [20]*, HT 12 [10]*
Advantages: 20 points from: Alertness [5/level], Combat Reflexes [15], Fearlessness [2/level], Fit or Very Fit [5 or 10], High Pain Threshold [10], Literacy [10], Magic Resistance [2/level], Patron (The Goresh) [Varies], Toughness [10]
Disadvantages: Duty (12 or less) [-10], and an additional -20 points from: Bloodlust [-10], Callous [-6], Code of Honor (Daga-Shai) [-10], Extremely Hazardous Duty [-20], Fanaticism or Extreme Fanaticism [-15], Intolerance [-5/-10], Loner [-5], Sense of Duty [-10].

Primary Skills: Daga-Shai Hand-Hand [12], 10 points in the following Combat/Weapon skills: Shortsword (P/A), Pistol Crossbow (P/E), Garrote (P/E), Knife (P/E), Knife Throwing (P/E).

Secondary Skills: Armoury/TL 3 (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Camouflage (M/E) IQ+1 [2] -- 12, Climbing (P/A) DX [2] -- 13, Holdout (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Shadowing (M/A) IQ [2] -- 11, Poisons (M/H) IQ-1 [2] -- 10.

Background Skills: 6 points in any of: Escape (P/A), First Aid (M/E), Language -- Anglish or Orcish (M/A), Survival -- Desert (M/A), Tracking (M/A), Traps (M/A)

* -- Includes racial modifiers

Notes

- **Attributes:** High DX is essential for an assassin. ST and IQ are also important attributes, and the Daga-Shai receive education to overcome their inherently low IQ. Half-Orcs are naturally robust so 12 was chosen to reflect this.
- **Advantages:** Alertness, Combat Reflexes, Fearlessness, Fit, High Pain Threshold, and Toughness reflect the Daga-Shai's training, and in order to function independently they need to be able to read (Literacy). Sometimes The Goresh takes special note of promising students (Patron), and many of the Daga-Shai who were born in the mana-poor Great Desert are resistant to magic (Magic Resistance).
- **Disadvantages:** All Daga-Shai are obligated to accept contracts assigned to them by The Goresh (Duty). Bloodlust, Callous, Intolerance, and Loner reflect the hardships and abuses suffered by Half-Orcs who grew up in either Human or Orcish society. The code of conduct and dangers of life in the Daga-Shai are reflected (Code of Honor, Extremely Hazardous Duty), as is the fervent loyalty towards, and willingness to protect their new home (Fanaticism, Extreme Fanaticism, Sense of Duty).
- **Primary Skills:** The Daga-Shai are killers first and foremost, and their primary skills reflect their ability in combat. All Daga-Shai are extensively trained in the close combat hand-to-hand style developed by Goresh Lekh, as well as in the Shatara -- the Daga-Shai shortsword, pistol crossbow, garrote, and knife.
- **Secondary Skills:** Included here are the skills necessary to get close enough to the target to kill him (Camouflage, Climbing, Holdout, and Shadowing), the ability to keep weapons in good repair (Armory), and knowledge of poisons. The Stealth skill is emphasized as part of the Daga-Shai hand-hand training (see below).
- **Background Skills:** The Daga-Shai live in the Great Desert, and Survival (Desert), Tracking, and Traps help them thrive in an inhospitable environment. First Aid is important in a high risk occupation, and Escape comes in handy in the event of capture.

Daga-Shai Hand-to-Hand

Goresh-Ka   12 points/15 points

This martial art style was developed by Goresh Lekh, the first Master of Daga-Shai, and incorporates elements of

Sahudese martial arts with the fighting techniques familiar to most Half-Orcs. Goresh-Ka stylists use stealth to close to within grappling distance of an unsuspecting target, then kill him with either knife, garrote, or bare hands. When unarmed, the Daga-Shai will always attempt to grapple and take down the opponent, preferably stunning them with a Head Butt, Knee Strike, or Pile Driver. Close Combat and Ground Fighting maneuvers are used to put the opponent at a disadvantage when defending or counter-attacking. The Goresh is considered a master of Goresh-Ka for the purposes of purchasing the Trained by a Master advantage.

Primary Skills: Brawling (P/E), Wrestling (P/A), Stealth (P/A)
Secondary Skills: Body Language (M/H)
Optional Skills: Breath Control (M/VH), Throwing (P/H)
Maneuvers: Arm Lock (Average), Choke Hold (Hard), Close Combat-Knife (Average), Drop Kick (Hard) Ground Fighting-Wrestling (Hard), Head Butt (Average), Head Lock (Hard), Hit Location-Knife or Knife Throwing (Hard), Knee Strike (Average)
Cinematic Skills: Immovable Stance (P/H), Kiai (P/H)
Cinematic Maneuvers: Piledriver (Hard)

Tactics

The Daga-Shai may shadow their targets for days before making their move. They like to familiarize themselves with their victim's routine, movements, and habits, and then set up an ambush, preferably when the target is alone. They prefer attacking at close range with small, easily concealed weapons. If forced to make a hit in public they will arrange a distraction to cover their escape. The Daga-Shai generally work alone on assignment, but will work in pairs or small groups for difficult jobs.

Weapons and Equipment

- **Ka-da (DX, Boxing, Brawling, or Karate)** -- Leather gloves reinforced with metal strips on the back and metal studs on the knuckles. Provides DR 3 to the hands and, like brass knuckles, adds +2 to damage with fists. Unlike brass knuckles there is no penalty to use weapons while wearing the Ka-da; however, skills requiring fine manual dexterity will be at -4 DX.
- **Sarash** -- A mottled, tan colored cloak with hood and veil worn by most Daga-Shai. Provides +2 to the camouflage skill when in a desert or sandstone environment.
- **Shatara (DX-5, Shortsword)** -- This primary melee weapon of the Daga-Shai is a sturdy single-edged shortsword with a sharp point for stabbing. Deep, regularly spaced slots are cut into the non-edged side of the Shatara. The Daga-Shai may attempt to parry at -4 to catch an attacker's weapon in one of the slots. He may then immediately attempt to either disarm the attacker by making a quick contest of weapons skills, or break the attacker's weapon, doing SW crushing damage.

Weapon	Type	Damage	Reach	Cost	Weight	Min ST	Notes
Shatara	imp	thr	1	$500	3	10	Can disarm or break weapon
	cut	sw	1				

Using the Daga-Shai

The Daga-Shai are intended as an NPC group that can be a serious thorn in the side of any PCs who run afoul of them. The template represents a novice, fresh out of training. An experienced assassin should be built on at least 150 points, while a veteran will have 200 or more points in skills and advantages. The Goresh should be at least a 500-point character.

The game master may also wish to allow the Daga-Shai as player characters. Although the template is expensive, it is still suitable for a 100-point campaign. The biggest obstacle to playing a Daga-Shai character is the onerous Duty

disadvantage, which requires the character to take assassination contracts on a frequent basis. Buying off the disadvantage would make the character a renegade, and she would be hunted down as a threat to the security of Naraghash. Alternatively, the character could be placed on retainer with the PC's. This would require that the Daga-Shai's share of income, treasure, etc., less living expenses, would be sent to Naraghash as her contract fee. Unless these payments are at least equal to what the character would earn taking assassination contracts, The Goresh will require that she terminate her partnership with the PC's and accept a new posting.

Daga-Shai Adventure Seed: A Little Too Much Information

The PC's are approached by a very nervous Half-Orc who desperately wishes to hire them to protect him from assassins. He tells the characters of a lost city in the Great Desert that is home to an evil death cult, and that he was kidnapped and brainwashed by the cult but has managed to escape their clutches. Now they want him dead. He offers the characters $4000.00 to get rid of the assassins on his trail.

What the Half-Orc doesn't tell the PC's is that he is a renegade Daga-Shai who grew tired of sending his contract fees to support the citizens of Naraghash and thought he could cut his ties, establish himself as an independent assassin, and keep the profits for himself. He figured the Daga-Shai would never miss him. That was, until a pair of his former brethren showed up in town and made the first attempt on his life. His hope is that the PC's will either eliminate the assassins or at least distract them long enough for him to get out of town and cover his trail.

Regardless of whether they accept the job or not, the characters will now be marked for assassination. If they accept, they will come into direct conflict with the Daga-Shai. If they refuse, the Daga-Shai will catch up with the renegade and make him talk before dispatching him. Because the renegade told the characters about Naraghash, they will be considered a threat that needs to be eliminated. If the characters kill the two assassins in town, more will arrive, and in greater numbers. The characters will be followed wherever they go and will encounter ambushes at the most inconvenient times.

The character's only hope of permanently ending the Daga-Shai threat is to convince The Goresh that they are no threat and swear to keep the secret of the Daga-Shai. To do this they must find Naraghash, brave the dangers of the Great Desert, and get past the sentinels and into the city without being killed. That's the easy part. The difficult part will be to obtain an audience with The Goresh and convince him of their sincerity.

Daga-Shai Character Example

Gulach

Gulach is a former Megalan pit-fighter, now Daga-Shai assassin. His exploitation as a gladiator by the wealthy elite of Megalos has left him contemptuous of humans, and that brutal lifestyle has made it difficult for him to open up to others and make friends. He considers his service in the Daga-Shai to be his salvation and redemption, and feels that it is the first worthwhile cause he has ever fought for.

Though he is a consummate professional, old habits from his past life often resurface and may bring him to a bad end some day. He likes a straight fight man-to-man, and will engage his opponents in a duel unless the mission requires a quick, silent kill. When he fights, the showman in him comes out, and he taunts his opponents, and opts for flashy, crowd pleasing maneuvers.

Gulach is a 150-point character.

ST 12, **DX** 13, **IQ** 12*, **HT** 12/13*
Speed: 6.25 **Move:** 6
Dodge: 7# **Parry:** 9# **Block:** 8#

Advantages: Acute Hearing +2*, Combat Reflexes, Extra Hit Points +1*, Literacy, Strong Will 1.

Disadvantages: Duty 12 or less, Fanaticism, Intolerance (humans), Loner, Reputation -2*, Stubbornness.

Quirks: Likes Duels, Taunts Foes, Showoff, Impatient, Smart Mouth.

Skills: Body Language-12; Brawling-15*; Buckler-14; Camouflage-12; Crossbow-14; Fast Draw (Knife)-14; Fast Draw (Sword)-14; First Aid-12; Garrote-14; Holdout-12; Knife-15; Knife Throwing-14; Performance-11; Poisons-11; Shadowing-13; Shortsword-16; Stealth-14; Survival (Desert)-11; Tracking-13; Wrestling-15.

Maneuvers: Arm Lock-15; Choke Hold-13; Close Combat (Knife)-14; Drop Kick-14; Ground Fighting (Wrestling)-13; Head Butt-11; Head Lock-12; Hit Location (Knife)-14; Knee Strike-14.

-- Includes Combat Reflexes
* -- Includes Half-Orc racial template

Men In Gaming

(I've had this column half-finished for a while, but last week's departure of Emily Dresner-Thornber's "Women in Gaming" column was the spark I needed to finish it.)

* * *

In the *Pyramid* newsgroup many moons ago (back when I was still a 2nd Level Editor), there was a rather heated debate over whether or not the gaming industry was discouraging women from entering the hobby, whether or not we should care, and other facets of gaming gender discussions.

Now, I tend to not talk about most issues like this directly, since it's too easy for them to break down to "Yes it is/No it isn't" dichotomies (either side of which is easy to ignore). Instead, I thought I'd share an incident of mine.

And, perhaps for once, I'm not sure that it has anything to with gaming.

When I was a wee l'il kid -- I'm guessing I was seven or eight, but I'm not sure -- I *really* wanted a Betty Crocker Easy-Bake Oven. I'm not sure why; the vagaries of memory being what they are, it's hard to understand the motivations of Young Me. I suspect it's because the idea seemed so neat; parents who wouldn't let their children within 100 yards of a "real" oven or stove would gleefully allow their children to harness the awesome powers of the light bulb. Maybe it's because I was such a junk food junkie that the notion of being able to concoct my own sugar buzzes was appealing. Sure, I could have settled for the Snoopy Sno-Cone Machine; but any hyperkinetic kid with ice cubes, a Ziplock bag, and a hammer can recreate snowcones. Not so with baked goods.

Regardless, I wanted an Easy Bake Oven. I'm pretty sure I wanted one for several years; for argument's sake, I'll say I longed for one on birthdays and Christmases on my seventh through ninth years.

And I never told anyone.

Not my parents, not my friends, not even Santa Claus. Not a soul.

And I can attribute this to one reason: Because everyone "knew" that boys didn't play with Easy-Bake Ovens. I mean, the commercials had nothing but grinning girls, mixing and baking in domestic abandon. It was in the girl toy aisles, the same domain as the Barbies and My Little Ponies and Monchichis. Heck, the oven itself was peach, and the box was *pink*, for pity's sake . . . and everyone knows what *that* means.

As a sensitive child ("sensitive" meaning "beat up by overgrown younger kids"), I decided to avoid any further headaches and instead stuck with manly (or at least boyly) pursuits: model cars, comics, GI Joes. And I liked them all well enough, but part of me still groused. If only there'd been a Transforming EZ Bake Battle Oven; *then* maybe I'd have been allowed to get it.

When I was eleven, I started cooking for real. After all, women may cook, but men could be chefs, so cooking must be an okay boy-thing to do. And to this day cooking is something I'm fairly good at (though I don't have the time or resources to cook as often as I'd like). But I sure didn't learn that skill from my childhood toys.

When I was twelve, I was introduced to the ***Dungeons & Dragons*** game . . . by Mrs. Dellon, my seventh grade social studies teacher. She was the last (and first) woman I knew who had played roleplaying games until I went to college. Since then, I've had about a 40% female gaming audience, often because I recruited from whatever genre they were interested in. ("Gee, you like *Star Trek*/*Indiana Jones*/*Elfquest*? Then you may like this . . .") By the time I got to college, I was also able to revel in my sensitive nature, and generally told some friends about my childhood Easy Bake Oven desire.

While I worked in the comic and gaming shop, I saw women who would set foot in the store, wince as they realized

they were in the wrong place, and flee. I saw women who consistently spent more than their male friends on Live Action, **Dragonlance**, **Harn**, **Changeling** and others. I saw women who would flip through a game book, frown as they came across particular pieces of artwork, and put the book down. I saw women who painted miniatures with a skill I will never know. I saw mothers shuffle their young daughters out of the gaming section, with an implied understanding that this was something girls weren't supposed to be interested in. I saw mothers buy the **Sailor Moon RPG** for their daughters, worrying as I handed them the receipt whether or not she'd like it. (I never had a copy of that RPG returned.)

My friend Kathryn threatened to buy me an Easy Bake Oven about a year ago; this was, she claimed, after a futile attempt to find me one for the previous Christmas. These ovens were much more gender neutral, looking like stylized microwave ovens. And I rejected her offer; I claimed this was because I didn't have room . . . which was mostly true. But part of me still felt the pressures of . . . something: maybe societal, parental, self-inflicted, or something else.

When these kind of issues are brought up, it's usually done to lay blame: it's the fault of parents/society/shop clerks/game companies/roleplayers/Delta Cepheians that we don't have more women in gaming. But such attempts aren't, in my mind, particularly helpful. Suffice it to say, I can definitely empathize with the barriers that keep many of us from trying what we may be curious about or interested in. And I'd hate to think that some young girl somewhere is being kept from a game she wants to try because it's in a blood-colored box, in the boy's aisle, next to the model cars and action figures.

* * *

Addendum

- Incidentally, I learned that a way many of my female friends got around the gender-issue thing was by having brothers; that way you got to play with their GI Joes, read their comics, etc.. Why it never occurred to me to have a sister, I'm not sure . . .
- Yes, I know that comics are boundless (and models and action figures); but I'm talking about society's perceptions of these hobbies . . . especially in the early 80's (the bulk of my cognitive childhood).
- It has been argued that we've made great strides and are now "good enough;" I'm not going to deny (or affirm) this. But I *will* point out that, even if the entire industry were somehow magically gender-blind as of 1990 (not an argument I'd defend with any vigor), that means we're still about five to ten years away from girls born in 1990 to being able to financially enter into the hobby fully.
- And, as I've [argued in the past](), it only takes one bad experience to undo a lot of good work.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Blood Brothers 2** (for **Call of Cthulhu**), p. 38.

(One star) "Any number of your Pawns which can legally move may all move one square forward. None of them may make a capture."

Skill-Based Energy Costs For GURPS Magic

?

by Robert Neal Byles

Art by Dan Smith and Colored by Keith Johnson

Energy costs for casting spells in *GURPS Magic* follow a very simple, linear rule: "Each spell has an energy cost. When you cast a spell, it costs you energy—either HT or ST. The better you know a spell, the less energy is required to cast it. If you know it well enough, you can cast it at *no* cost." (*GURPS Magic*, 2nd, Ed., p. 8) This is a well-reasoned explanation; however some have always felt that the implementation of this statement in the rules was somewhat limited. Energy cost drops by 1 point at Skill 15 and by 1 additional point for every 5 Skill Levels after that. This is simple, yes, but not only is it rather static, it tends to result in cookie-cutter mages; how many mages exist with an IQ 14 and Magery 3 so that all of their M/H spells are at 15?

Currently, each player knows how much it is going to cost him before he casts the spell, every time. This lacks the danger and uncertainty (beyond the possibility of a Critical Failure) that fantasy literature often ascribes to mage-craft. Furthermore, a character gets a fair boon at Skill 15 but has little motivation to improve from there, other than to power-spend her points until she reaches Skill 20 and the cost goes down another point. Again, this leads to cookie-cutter mages with skills levels that tend to jump in five point increments.

The following system takes the above statement about the connection between energy cost and skill and adds a third factor: how well the caster concentrates and performs the necessary rituals for the spell. Or, to put it more basely, how well the player rolls the dice. The net result is that, with lucky rolls, a mage's spells can cost him significantly less than they do under the official system. This is balanced by the addition of a further element of risk. A failed roll no longer costs a mere 1 point in energy but will usually cost the mage more than it would have had the spell succeeded.

Energy Cost of the spell, as listed in the spell descriptions, remains as the Base Cost of the spell. This is then modified by the relative success (or failure) of the die roll to the spell caster's skill level, as well as the mana level of the region. The number by which the skill roll succeeds is the Level of Success and is negative in the case of a failed roll. This will yield either a positive modifier to the base cost (more energy), a negative modifier to the same (less energy) or no modifier at all, according to the following table.

Level of Success	Energy Modifier			
	Low Mana	Normal	High	Very High
Crit Failure	+5	+3	+2	+1
-9 to -6	+4	+2	+1	Base Cost
-5 to -2	+3	+1	Base Cost	-1
-1, 0 or 1	+2	Base Cost	-1	-2
2 to 3	+1	-1	-2	-3
4 to 5	Base Cost	-2	-3	-4
6 to 7	-1	-3	-4	-5

8 to 9	-2	-4	-5	-6
Crit Success	-3	-5	-6	-7

This is, of course, in lieu of the deductions to cost as they are now written. (Thus the minus 1 point at skill level 15, 2 at 20, etc, no longer apply.) Assuming normal-mana, both a success by 10 or more and a Critical Success, regardless of the amount by which it succeeds, are always -5. Likewise, Critical Failure and failure by 10 or more are always +3. Adjustments to rituals and casting time due to high (or low) Skill Level remain as described in *Magic*.

If a mage wishes to maintain a spell beyond its normal duration, cost to do this is determined based on one of two choices made by the mage. She can either use the energy cost based on the initial casting roll, or she can roll again hoping for a better result. Whatever the new result, the mage is obligated to pay it. She does not have the option of letting the spell lapse rather than pay a higher cost to maintain. Note that only a critical failure at this stage will negate the spell. A normal failure will result in a higher energy cost to maintain but the spell will continue to function as per the original casting.

Example: Sir Seamus casts a Shield spell on Sir Fenris, a fellow Templar Knight, increasing Fenris' Passive Defense by 4. Due to Fatigue, Seamus' ST is currently 9. Shield costs 2 energy per bonus (half that to maintain) for a base cost of 8/4. Seamus rolls a 9, which is 4 less than his skill level of 13. The Energy Modifier is -2 so his spell costs him 6 points. A minute later the battles rages on. Seamus maintains the spell for another minute but as his remaining ST is only 3 he knows that 3 more points for maintaining the Shield (half the cost of the initial casting) will knock him out (down to 0 ST). He decides to trust in God and try a new roll. Seamus rolls a 15, 2 more than his skill! This results in an Energy Modifier of +1, bringing his base cost to maintain (4—half the original base) up to 5. His last three points of ST are depleted and he takes 2 hits of damage from his HT before passing out cold! Fenris, however, keeps his +4 PD for another minute and manages to win the day. The Lord works in mysterious ways . . .

If a spell is cast using a Powerstone or Manastone and the Stone is depleted in the casting, the overage is drawn from the caster's ST as fatigue. If the caster's ST is depleted in the casting, the mage passes out, and any overage comes directly off of HT as injury! This only flows one way. In other words, energy that exceeds a character's ST cannot be transferred to available Powerstones, nor can overage to HT be diverted to Powerstones or ST. However, the player may announce a split between various sources of power (ST, HT or Powerstone) before the casting. These should be in percentages rather than actual number of points, using quarters, halves, and thirds. Remainders should be split as evenly as possible with any remainders going to the selected source that is highest in the list. That is, Powerstones first, ST second and HT last, but only if such a source was indicated. Thus, if a player chose to split the cost between ST and HT, the remainders would go to ST, and not to any Powerstones he might be carrying.

Example: Ebonan casts a 3-hex Mass Sleep spell (base cost of 9). Prior to casting he decides that three-fourths of the cost will draw from his ST while the remaining quarter will come from the Powerstone in his staff. If he succeeds by 4 then the spell costs him 7 points. 3 points are deducted from his ST (three-fourths of 7, rounded down) and 1 point comes off of his Powerstone (one-fourth, rounded down). What's left is split, with 1 point taken from each and the final point coming off of the Powerstone. The end result then is 4 points from ST and 3 from the Powerstone.

As noted above, this system gives mages the advantage that their spells, if they are good at them, should cost significantly less to cast, while sometimes costing nothing at all. The disadvantage is that they will sometimes cost more, and failures will be terribly expensive. This adds a random element to the game which will make running mages more dangerous and difficult, but also more realistic and fun. If Corenth is down to 3 Fatigue but needs to bring off that last 3-dice Fireball to save the day, does he risk it? If he succeeds by 2 or more, he's golden (if rather exhausted), but if he fails he passes out. If, however, Corenth succeeds by zero or one, the Fireball goes off as expected the instant before he blacks out. Corenth is our hero!

Differing mana levels will shift this table in one way or the other as shown. This system chooses to ignore the low-mana modifier to skill level on the grounds that this system restricts spell casting in low-mana areas enough, but this is entirely up to the GM. Magic items that require a roll and/or an energy cost will cost the listed amount, regardless of the roll or the Power of the item.

Most of the spells in *Magic* and *Grimoire* function under this system with no necessary modifications. A possible exception to this is the Recover Strength spell. While Recover Strength can work as is, this system suggests an intriguing alternative. Rather than treat Recover Strength as a form of Advantage, as it does in the official description, this system treats it more like a Skill, complete with ritual and die roll.

Recover Strength   **Special**

Works on the caster himself; cannot restore ST to others. Allows the caster to recover fatigue by "tapping into" the local ambient mana to "recharge," as it were. The caster must rest quietly for the necessary casting time but may maintain ordinary spells so long as they do not require concentration. Note that Recover Strength is the only spell with a Base Cost of 0 as well as the only spell that can yield a negative Energy Modifier.

With a Base Cost of 0, a success by 5 would yield a net result of -2 energy cost. This means that the caster would regain 2 points of lost Fatigue. Similarly, a failed casting of Recover Strength can result in a loss of ST. Thus, a failure by 4 would yield a +1 modifier and actually cost the poor mage a point of ST. Note that Recover Strength can be cast in a low-mana area (but not a no-mana area, obviously) assuming the caster is willing to risk it.

This spell may only be cast once every ten minutes in the same 10-hex radius location, regardless of who casts it. That is, a mage must either wait for ten minutes or move to a new location before casting this spell again, and two mages may not cast the spell if they are within 10 yards of each other. This is because the spell channels the local mana into the mage, which temporarily depletes the area. In low-mana zones this is thirty minutes and thirty yards, respectively. In high-mana areas this is five minutes and five yards, and in very high-mana areas minutes and yards are both two.

Duration: Permanent.
Base Cost: 0.
Time to Cast: 1 minute.
Prerequisite: Magery; Lend Strength
Item: Jewelry. Recharges the wearer's ST at the rate of 1 per minute assuming she can move around enough to compensate for the 10-hex radius restriction; always on. Automatically interferes with the use of Recover Strength spells, by the wearer or others, within its area of effect. Interferes with Powerstones as well as if it was a Powerstone itself—it is always considered to be the "largest stone" in the area. This item would be exceedingly rare. Energy cost to create: 1500; must be made of alloyed gold and platinum (minimum value of a small ring $500).

by Jody Macgregor

The TV channellers are a power group for use in Atlas Games' *Over the Edge*. They could also be used as a secret group in some of the other current postmodern conspiracy games. Notes on specific game conversions can be found at the end of the article.

TV Channellers

"Ancient cultures did not worship idols. Their god-statues represented ideal states which, when meditated constantly upon, one might aspire to."
-- Alan Moore

"God is in the TV."
-- Marilyn Manson

Type: Secret Society of sorts.
Rep: None.
Brief: Individuals are unwittingly channelling ancient archetypes, invoked by actors on TV, gaining their powers and weaknesses.
Allies and Enemies: Depends on the individual. The Movers are curious about them, and a little fearful. Most of the other power groups in the Edge don't even know they exist, yet.

A recent use of the Cut-Ups Machine (a reality-altering contraption) had some unexpected side effects. The statue of Her Exaltedness in Sunken Plaza changed pose slightly. A prostitute fired from Sad Mary's was miraculously cured of an STD. And the ancient archetypes who were once humanity's gods woke up and demanded homage.

All over the island of Al Amarja, sensitive people started identifying with TV characters more strongly than they previously had. And with that identification came powers, whether the wit of a comedian, the strength of an action hero, or the seductiveness of the classic femme fatale. Unknowingly, several individuals had invoked powerful beings, but there was a down side as well. With these abilities came new goals, and in some cases, weaknesses. The channellers became drawn into the kind of story their archetype was portrayed in. The comedian channeller finds "A funny thing happened to me on the way here," everywhere he goes, terrorists and psychopaths begin attacking the action hero channeller, and the femme fatale channeller begins throwing herself at action heroes. Some of the channellers love it, but others just want their old lives back.

Who is susceptible? Perhaps it's people who watch too much TV, perhaps it's people with untapped fringe powers or

maybe it's people Dr. Nusbaum has treated recently. It's up to you.

New Fringe Power: TV Channelling

TV channelling works slightly like the fringe power Atavism, except that additional dice don't represent extra personae but a stronger connection to the one persona. For each 'shot' characters have in their psychic pool (here called the rerun pool), they may make one die roll on the trait, or negate reality in one way relevant to their archetype's genre. For example, if the action hero takes a bullet, he can use one shot from his pool to reposition the bullet to his shoulder, or make it "just a flesh wound." He can use his next shot to attack back. If that sounds pretty damn powerful, that's because it is -- this isn't a power for your players. Disadvantages include a gradual loss of control to the archetype possessing them, and any flaws the archetype itself possesses. To regain shots in the rerun pool channellers may wait 24 hours in the usual way, but they will recover at twice the normal rate if watching appropriate television.

Who Are The Archetypes?

- Back in the Golden Age men worshipped the gods, and that worship was what kept them alive. Since then, the gods have been forgotten, almost starving to death from lack of belief. Now, humanity has something new to worship: fame. The amount of worship churned out nightly in front of television sets around the world reached a critical level, and the Cut-Ups machine merely tapped into this. It has allowed the gods to come out of their half-death, take new forms that will soak up the most worship and possess a new generation of prophets, high priests and other empty angels.
- Every human being has the potential to be more than they are, if only they can tap the uncharted regions of their own minds. Focussing on near-perfect "god-statues" is one way of doing that, and actors portraying certain easily recognized stereotypical roles are the new god-statues.
- Whoever you want them to be. Fnord.

GMCs

Clydette Ruyters
Plucky Little Girl

"I'll get you next time little girl! And your f---in' dog too!"
-- Hassan Granberry, one of Al Amarja's foremost smugglers, being
led away by the Peace Force after they received information from
Clydette Ruyters

Clydette was watching her favorite cartoon, The Magical Adventures
of Princess Esmerelda (on The Goat in the Coat's Cartoon Hour),
when her archetype took up residence. Since then she has had all the
abilities of a kid's TV show heroine but she hasn't noticed. She thinks
it's normal to have a pet giant robot in your treehouse and a talking dog. See what watching cartoons can do to your brain?

Al Amarjan girl, age six, 115 cm, 23 kg, curly brown hair, disgustingly cute.

Languages: Al Amarjan patois, something that might grow up to be English.
Rerun Pool: 6 shots
Traits
Plucky, 2 dice -- She is able to outsmart almost any adult she meets, completely unafraid of danger, and can only really be harmed by knockout gas, twisted ankles, scraped knees, and boys who pull her pigtails. Any animal that spends too much time around her starts talking, then progresses to singing happy songs.
Disgustingly cute, 3 dice -- She can wrap most parents around her little finger. (Sign: curly hair.)

Talking Animal Sidekick -- Her pet poodle Fifi can talk, which surprised the hell out of Fifi. He doesn't say anything useful, but acts as comic relief and hides whenever danger approaches. He's tried chatting up the Great Dane next door (she's a whole lotta woman), but normal dogs seem immune to cheesy French accents and droopy flowers. (Sign: dog constantly at her heels.)

Little girl, penalty die -- inexperience and small stature works against her. (Sign: young.)

Kill-O-Bot X5000
Reformed Killer Android

The Kill-O-Bot X5000 was created by Dr. Hugh Tinkler (a fringe scientist from D'Aubainne University) for military and general mindless rampaging purposes. It's a miracle of stainless steel and the thin boundary between reality and fantasy on Al Amarja, with spinning blades extending from its hands, a taser that shoots from its waist and laser beam eyes. Actually, the laser beams will only cause damage if you stare directly into them, but they sure look mean. In the tradition of these things, the Kill-O-Bot X5000 escaped from Dr. Tinkler's laboratory and went on a mindless killing spree, until Clydette Ruyters found it hiding from the Loyal Defenders in her treehouse. It leapt at her, blades spinning, taser crackling, lasers threatening cancer in later life -- and then it stopped. The only robots that plucky little heroines meet are friendly ones. The Kill-O-Bot X5000's programming re-wrote itself instantly, much to its own surprise, and ever since then 'Robby the Robot' has been cowering in shame in that treehouse. Clydette sneaks Robby batteries that she steals from her mommy's drawer, and the Kill-O-Bot X5000 plays tea parties.

Android, 185 cm when not stooping, 150 kg. Sleek, curved and metallic.

Languages: Grating English, Basic, C++ and to its eternal shame, COBOL.
Attack: 4 dice, X5 (temporary damage as per rules on p. 23) with Taser, X2 with blades.
Defense: 4 dice
Hit points: 42 (steel)
Traits
Robotic -- Resistant to all poisons, diseases, and other human frailties. (Sign: made of metal.)
Killer, 4 dice -- If Clydette was ever threatened, or taken out of the picture, the Kill-O-Bot would revert to its original programming. (Sign: retractable blades in its hands and a gleam in its eyes.)
Pacifist -- So long as Clydette is around, the Kill-O-Bot can't harm a fly. (Sign: Opens doors when asked.)
Secret: Sexually attracted to C3P0.

Story Ideas

- During the course of the series, the PCs are likely to get up to some strange-looking stuff, meeting with suspicious types in dark alleys, getting into fights, and stocking up on weapons. Every time they do, Clydette Ruyters and her dog are there to see it. Pretty soon they're being followed by the Peace Force who are convinced that they're dangerous smugglers (because the police always listen to little girls in the stories, right?).
- The PCs are given the job of tracking down the rogue Kill-O-Bot, either by Dr. Tinkler, the Gladsteins or some other organization with enough power over them and an interest. Now all they have to do is convince a little girl that they don't want to harm her before the Kill-O-Bot slices and dices them.

Mock Rushkoff
Psycho Killer

Mock's personal history doesn't suggest the kind of deep emotional disturbance common to serial killers; he wasn't abused as a child, he wasn't a chronic bed-wetter, and he never set fire to small animals. He may be twentysomething, white and male, but he's no template post-industrial social outcast. But ever since he saw a serial killer of the month movie on AATV, he's just liked killing people.

Since finishing school, Mock has been working as a waiter at Rugosi's. His targets (two so far) have been young women who ignored him while he served them. He realizes this pattern may lead to his being caught and is planning to move on to prostitutes and homeless people. Deep down, the Jack the Ripper via Norman Bates archetype inside of him hopes to be caught so that he can have a confrontation and philosophical discussion with his pursuers. It may even go so far as to plant clues without Mock noticing.

He also plans to enrol at D'Aubainne University so that he can join the Delta Epsilon Theta fraternity.

Al Amarjan man of Russian descent, age 21, 170 cm, 58 kg. Short sandy brown hair, face that scares small children.

Languages: English, Al Amarjan patois, some Russian.
Attack: 2 dice (Mock strangles his victims)
Defense: 2 dice
Hit Points: 21 (psychopathic determination)
Rerun Pool: 3 shots
Traits
Psycho Killer, 2 dice -- When Mock follows a woman into a dark alley, nobody disturbs him. When he stares at people and talks softly about the sweetness of death they can't help but be afraid. He also has basic, instinctual knowledge of police procedure and a yearning to visit Whitechapel. (Sign: unsettling laugh.)
Fast Runner, bonus die -- He was always good at junior athletics and now it's paying off. Mock receives a bonus die on any test he takes while being chased. (Sign: wears running shoes.)
Waiter, 2 dice -- Carrying drinks without spilling them, being incongruous and smiling as he hands out the soup he just spat in. (Sign: talks about wine.)

Story Ideas

- The obvious idea is to have the PCs solve the murder and catch Mock, but once they do the story has only just begun. Why did he leave such obvious clues, as though he wanted to be caught? Why did a such a well-adjusted young man all of a sudden become a death and religion obsessed psychopath? With a little bit of help, the PCs may notice that all of the killings took place while a murder movie was being shown on television, and with a little help from Brace Kwong (see below) they might discover the other channellers.

Art Prolix
Action Hero

Once upon a time Art Prolix was just a rather mediocre bag-packer at the local supermarket, content with his life, his income, and his stash. But now, Art is something more. Ever since a fateful overdose of zoroaster (a perception-altering drug) taken while watching the Sly and Arnie movie marathon, he's been channelling the eternal action hero. People notice him when he walks into a room, every time he gets in a car a chase scene ensues, he's always thrown clear of the blast, and he always feels lucky, punk. Hostage situations and natural disasters follow him. At first it was a blast, but now Art wants out. Half of his family has been killed by bullets with his name on them, his girlfriend left

him after she was kidnapped three times in the same week, and he's starting to talk in cliches. Unfortunately, the only way he can see out of it is the action hero's way: he has to find the bad guy responsible (preferably a smarmy English guy in a suit, but failing that anyone with a goatee) and kill him in an action-packed extravaganza that would make John Woo weep with envy.

Al Amarjan man, age 25, 180 cm, 70 kg. Shaved head, jutting chin, winning smile.

Languages: Al Amarjan patois, English, swearing in German, Italian and most European languages.
Attack: 3 dice
Defense: 3 dice
Hit Points: 29 (toughness)
Rerun Pool: 5 shots
Traits
Action hero, 3 dice -- May be used in any physical confrontation, test of wits or poker game. He's always wearing a bullet-proof vest after he's been shot in the chest, if he's not shot in the chest it's a flesh wound to the shoulder (he's had twelve of those so far) plus all of the examples given in his description. (Sign: steely blue eyes)
Bag packing, 2 dice -- The world's least useful trait. (Sign: "Paper or plastic?")

Michelle Boulanger
Mover Operative and Femme Fatale

Michelle has been assigned by her cell to keep an eye on Art for obvious reasons; he's accidentally foiled the plots of three drug rings and two terrorist groups that they know of. But since she's started keeping tabs on Art, Michelle's found herself drawn into a new role. Maybe she shouldn't have watched *Octopussy* that night, because ever since then she's been unwittingly channelling femme fatale. It was an easy role to fall into for a French secret agent.

Michelle has only shown herself to Art once: when a nasty was about to pop a cap in him, she came to the rescue as though the script demanded it. She has a vague idea of what's going on, but finds herself drawn to fulfil her expectations anyway -- she's slowly falling in love with Art, and considering betraying her superiors. Whether she winds up the redeemed femme or the betraying femme, she probably won't be back for the sequel.

Attractive French woman, age 28, 162 cm, 53 kg, long dark brown hair, brown eyes, works of art for legs.

Languages: French, English, Al Amarjan patois.
Attack: 3 dice
Defense: 3 dice
Hit Points: 21 (tough)
Rerun Pool: 3 shots
Traits
Moving, 3 dice -- Getting people to do and believe what she wants with subtle psychological cues. (Sign: non-threatening demeanor)
Femme Fatale, 3 dice -- Seduction, and all the fighting moves familiar to Bond girls, mostly karate strikes and cheap crotch kicks. (Sign: flirtatious)
Cello playing, 2 dice -- Hard to carry around, but possibly the sexiest of all the classical instruments. (Sign: complains about Mozart hating cellists)

Story Ideas

- The PCs are sent in by Michelle's Mover superiors (possibly operating through the party's normal contacts) to ascertain why she has gone AWOL, and remove her if she becomes a threat. This will of course set Art after them to gain vengeance and find his nemesis. Any of your PCs have a goatee and an accent?

Brace Kwong

Televisionary

Brace knows all about the ancient archetypes and their ways, because *Wheel of Fortune* told him so. Brace is a televisionary; he uses random channel surfing as a means of divination. Is it any weirder than reading entrails? Normally the television is a fickle mistress, restraining its powers of prophesy when Brace needs them most (like before the lottery numbers are drawn), but this information came through loud and clear. Brace Kwong is now the Edge's foremost expert on TV channellers and willing to help anybody, for the right price.

Asian man, age 30, 170 cm, 77 kg, black hair, glasses.

Languages: Mandarin, English, Al Amarjan Patois
Traits
Televisionary, 2 dice -- When using his powers, Brace either clears his mind for a general reading, or concentrates on a specific question, munches some ceremonial potato chips, and channel surfs. The random snatches of speech and image resolve themselves into a semi-coherent message, most of the time. (Sign: heavily callused right thumb.)
TV expert, 4 dice -- You can learn a lot from documentaries and Brace knows all of it. (Sign: "Did you see that show last night about the rhesus monkeys? It was amazing.")
Couch Potato, penalty die -- A sedentary lifestyle has led to Brace becoming somewhat lacking in the physical fitness department. (Sign: chubby.)

Story Ideas

- Brace tracks down the party after they have an encounter with one of the channellers; he's offering information. The signals he's been receiving are high-definition and crystal-clear reception about their activities. For a constant supply of snack food and a little cash in hand, he's willing to help the PCs keep tabs on the channellers and save the world from being turned into prime-time zombies. How to do it? Kill the babysitter: blow up the TV station.

Conversion Notes

The TV channellers could make interesting opponents or allies in an *Unknown Armies* campaign, just remember to give Alex Abel a reason to want them dead. There's also a possible connection with the Naked Goddess; was she channelling the Porn Star archetype when she ascended to the Invisible Choir?

In a *Mage: The Ascension* saga, the TV Channellers (remember to capitalize names for White Wolf) could be an Orphan clique waiting to be brought together, somewhat like the Hollow Ones. Unless of course the Technocracy (in the form of the New World Order) gets to them first.

Pyramid Review

Hexarcana (for the Deadlands RPG)

By Pinnacle Entertainment Group

Written by John Goff

128 pages; $20.00

Hexarcana, by Pinnacle Entertainment Group's John Goff, both updates and
collects the new Arcane Backgrounds released in three boxed sets (Martial Artist,
Thaumaturgical Diffusionists, and Voodooist) and an expands the spells and
powers available to the standard spell-casting Arcane Backgrounds (Blessed, Huckster, and Shaman). While the book
is specifically targeted to only a portion of Deadlands players and Marshals, Goff's work is up to his usual high
standards and can be used by anyone willing to convert the material into their favorite gaming system.

Players with the standard spell-casting Arcane Backgrounds (Blessed, Hucksters, and Shamans) will find seventeen
new miracles, five gifts, two divine interventions, six tricks, eleven hexes, three guardian spirits, and sixteen favors in
this work. These are all written for the second edition rules and include some notes on updating first edition characters
to second edition system. Each of these are new and do not repeat information found in the supplements designed for
each of these Arcane Backgrounds (*Fire and Brimstone*, *Hucksters and Hexes*, and *Ghost Dancers*, respectively).
Players trying to decide between one of these earlier books or *Hexarcana* should probably go with the original book
first, as there will be more information specific to their background there. Those wishing to expand on this information
will not be disappointed in what they read.

Players wishing to play one of the new Arcane Backgrounds (Martial Artist, Thaumaturgical Diffusionist, and
Voodooist) will be very pleased with *Hexarcana*. The information on each of these Backgrounds, previously only
available in the *Great Maze*, *City of Gloom*, and *River of Blood* boxed sets, has been updated to the second edition
rules. This one-stop shopping will also be of benefit to Marshals, who previously would have to carry and consult
several books to find information about these backgrounds.

If you are trying to decide if these backgrounds have a place in your campaign, here is a brief rundown of each. The
rules for Martial Artists cover not only the basic styles of Chinese Martial Arts (although other Oriental Arts can be
approximated using these rules) but also the more cinematic and mystical powers associated with chi. Thaumaturgical
Diffusionists combine the advances of Mad Science with the magical powers of Hucksters. Includes with this are a list
of four new tricks and thirty-five new hexes specific to this "background" (They may all be used by any Huckster,
should they be discovered by one.). Voodooists use subtle magical spells, rather than the more showy spells available
to Hucksters and Black Magicians. This Arcane Background can be of potential use to Marshals wishing to create
villains working for Bayou Vermillion.

This book has few real defects. Some of the internal art is uneven in quality, and the darkened watermark used on each
chapter introduction page makes reading those pages a little difficult. But these are minor quibbles. The one real
weakness this book may have is the relatively narrow audience: Marshals and players with Arcane Backgrounds. The
game system is not necessarily limiting, as much of the material in this book can be included in other game systems.
With the addition of *GURPS Deadlands* to the Steve Jackson line, this book can be easily moved into a variety of
settings and periods. Also missing is the short adventure found in most of the earlier Deadlands releases. This absence,
however, does allow for more information on the covered Arcane Backgrounds.

Despite this, *Hexarcana* remains a solid piece of quality work. Players may wonder if $20 is worth a relatively small

addition to their character's options -- those on a budget may consider teaming up with a friend who plays one of the other Arcane Backgrounds covered -- but Goff's writing and creations are well worth the price.

-- *Matthew DeForrest*

Pyramid Review

Battle of the Bands: The Rock and Roll Card Game

Produced by [D.S.I.](#)

Created by Dan Smith

103 cards; $5.00

Dan Smith is well known to gamers as an illustrator of SJ Games products, *Sparks* paper miniatures, and so on. Now he offers a game that he has both illustrated and designed. Priced at $5, it would be hard for *Battle of the Bands* *not* to be worth the money. Every player gets to play out their dream of starting a Rock and Roll band and making a go of it in the music business. Some band members come and go, but the music goes on. At least, it goes on until one of the bands achieves superstardom beyond the ken of all the others.

Game play is simple and easy to learn. Each turn, players draw enough cards so that they have six in their hand and then play or discard one of them. There are several varieties of cards.

Players play Band Member cards to add to their band. Everyone begins with themselves as a member (in the form of a card labelled "Me") and can add up to three members from a varied lot including such rockers as the voluptuous Kym, a grinning Mr. Death, a gorilla named Fella, and Santa.

By playing Instrument and Reputation cards, players can make band members more or less hip. In game terms, this means that the member has more or fewer Hip Points, an attribute abbreviated HP. Of course, HP are just a measure of the band member's coolness, and may not translate into commercial success.

There are also Hit Single and Gig cards, which give a player Superstar Points. Although Superstar Points ultimately decide victory, these cards can not be played unconditionally. Instead, players may only play Hit Singles if they have already played Contract cards. A Gig can be played at any time, but starts a contest between bands. Regardless of who played the Gig card, the band with the most HP's -- the cooler band -- is more likely to win the Superstar Points.

There are also Music Biz cards. This is a catch-all category of cards that allow players to change reputations, steal hit singles, force members to leave rival bands, and so on.

As one would expect, the game is visually impressive. Band members and instruments are drawn with Smith's characteristic flair. Even the fonts are spiffy-looking. Not all the cards have drawings on them, but all are attractively designed and well laid out. The Reputation cards, for instance, list a positive reputation on one end and a negative reputation on the other. If a band member has a positive reputation as a Sex Machine, then the card can be put under the band member with just the bonus showing. If that later changes so that he has a negative reputation for being Diseased, the card can be rotated so that just the penalty is showing.

Battle of the Bands does not involve complicated strategy. If you and your grognard buddies are looking for something to alternate with *Squad Leader*, this is not it. That said, there is enough strategy that players get to make choices during their turns and won't feel straight-jacketed.

No doubt spoiled by Cheapass Games, I was slightly disappointed by the game material itself. The game comes in a zip-lock bag with the cards wrapped in the game rules, unlike the printed paper envelope and cards bound with a strip

of glossy paper that come with many Cheapass games. Moreover, the cards for ***Battle of the Bands*** are printed on flimsier stock. There are a whopping 103 cards, however, making the stack of cards two to three times the size of what you get with comparably priced Cheapass games. In any case, if I learned anything from Cheapass it was that material is not nearly so important as playability.

Ultimately, this is a charming and entertaining game. In my first time playing, my dad and I (the band member cards were "Me" and "Dad") got a record contract and recorded a single that went double platinum, while the opposing band (a talented bunch with double-digit Hip Points) languished in obscurity. Just the image of me and my dad making it big in the music industry was silly enough to make the game worth my while. You don't know either me or my dad, but I daresay that you'll have a good time with ***Battle of the Bands***.

-- P.D. Magnus

Pyramid Review

Into the Dragon's Lair (for D&D 3rd Ed)

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Sean K. Reynolds and Steve Miller

96 b&w pages; $17.95

The first post-*3rd Edition Dungeons & Dragons* adventure for the *Forgotten Realms* isn't an introductory adventure, but a scenario for four 10th level characters. This adventure shows how Cormyrm, a country renown for its Purple Dragon soldiers and War Wizards, carries on after the novels *The High Road* and *The Death of A Dragon*. In short, a babe is destined for the throne which throws the country into chaos as nobles and merchants consolidate their power.

The adventure starts with a section detailing the background of the adventure, but the story begins with the characters meeting Lady Kestrel of Arabel. She seeks their aid in recovering the wealth of the dragon that killed the king. A few other suggestions are given for getting the players on the dragon hunt, and a few methods are listed for players who don't have to travel overland (such as by flying), but for the most part it's a standard hunt for treasure.

While sounding simple, during the course of the adventure, the players must deal with not one, but *two* rival groups of adventurers. The Freedom Warriors, a self righteous group lead by Hyraken (a deluded but powerful warrior), and Mahrlee's Raiders, a group lead by a powerful female who has a very special secret. In addition to rivals, the party is pitted against tax collectors (both those working for the crown and for themselves), as well as powerful priests of Talos, and undead soldiers intent on serving the country by turning everyone else into undead.

On their quests, players get to travel to not one, but *two* demiplanes. The first is the home of the goblin city of Grodd, while the second is where the dragon's lair remains. The city of Grodd provides over thirty local areas, not counting temples. DMs should be able to get not only a good game session out of the city, but should also be able to use it in future campaigns. The authors include different options for adventuring in the goblin city. Being high level adventurers, the party always has the option of simply battling the goblins, but ideas for parleying and stealth are also included.

The Hoard Demiplane isn't nearly as interesting, but does pit the players against evil elves that aren't drow . . . not quite a first in the *Forgotten Realms*, but close to it. Players may also match wits against giant wasps, trolls, and a solitary wyvern before finding the hoard.

In comparison to past adventures, the treasure hoard itself is small, especially for a group of 10th level chracters. For example, there are only 7,090 gold pieces . . . a far cry from some of the stashes in adventurers like *The Ruins of Undermountain I* & *II*, or *White Plume Mountain*. To make up for it, there are some choice magic items.

The section on concluding the adventure offers brief ideas on how to handle not only the influx of money to Corymr, but also hints at future events that can involve the elves and goblins.

The Appendix covers Grodd bolins in *Monster Manual* format. It also includes individual listings for different professions such as Adept, General, and Sneak, as well as group encounters. There is one new magic item, six new spells, and some information on converting specialty priests from old campaigns. Trust me, it took three books to get all the information out for 2nd edition; a one page conversion listing isn't going to cut it. The book ends on Shadow Creatures, natives of the Plane of Shadow, and includes a Template that GMs can add to their favorite creatures.

The adventure flows smoothly. Two problems plauge the book, though. First off, unless the DM is very comfortable running NPC antagonists, he's going to have a bit of a problem with the two NPC groups. Lord Hyraken has many feats but few powerful possessions. The other members of the group fall below Lord Hyraken in sheer power, and most parties should be able to plow through them with few difficulties. Lord Hyraken has an Armor Class of 21, and uses a Greatsword +2; using his feats properly, he can be very dangerous, but this requires a lot of work on the DM's part. Mahrlee's Raiders are more powerful, especially with Mahrlee's secret abilities, but once again, an experienced group should be able to handle the Raiders with minimal difficulty.

The second problem is that there are no pregenerated characters. The **Player's Handbook** has been out since Gen Con, which really hasn't given any but the most dedicated groups of players time to advance to 10th level. Then again, this could be a crossover product, where players take their characters from 2nd to 3rd edition; but if that's the case, the differences should have been highlighted. For example, the adventure **The Gates of Firestorm Peak** was designed from the ground up to show the options available to players via the **Players Options** series of books. In addition, there are no conversion notes for 2nd edition campaigns, which would have gone a long way to making this book more useable (though conversion guides are available for free).

At $17.95, it's an expensive adventure, but priced better than the $9.95 adventurers which only run 32 pages. My advice? Keep reading *Dungeon* magazine for adventurers, and wait for the revamped **Forgotten Realms** setting before attempting to leap into a high level adventure in a very detailed campaign world.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Montejon's Mutters

Path of Deception (for Earthdawn RPG)

Published by [Published by Living Room Games]

Created by Joe Chan, Damon Early, Gary McBride, Bert Sanders, and Mike Williams

120 pgs + bonus CD; $14.00

"As you journey through life, take a minute every now and then to give a thought for the other fellow. He could be plotting something."
-- Dik Browne, *Hagar the Horrible*

This time on Montejon Mutters we are taking a look at the rebirth of the *Earthdawn* RPG. Living Room Games has shipped its first release, Path of Deception, bundled with a CD containing the complete *Earthdawn*

1 -- Stop the Presses! Please!
2 -- Buyer's Regret
3 -- Worth the Price of Admission
4 -- A Fine Addition to the Library
5 -- Buy Buy Buy!

rulebook, an introductory adventure with quick-start rules, and tools for playing *Earthdawn* on the web. The Path of Deception book itself describes an adventure set in the Forgotten City of Parlainth.

The cover art for Path of Deception set the tone of my expectations: cheesy, cheap and incomprehensible. Boy, was I wrong. The interior layout is clean and crisp, and the editing is well-done. The writing is clear and forthright. Even better, the actual adventure (more of a mini-campaign, really) looks like dashed good fun. It even has an airship!

Oh, and there's treachery. That is a surefire way to win my blackened heart.

Let's pick it apart, shall we? First off, the things I didn't like.

1. *Meta-plot.* I was saddened to read the following sentence at the very end of ***Path of Deception*** (italics mine): "The fates of Garron Karlson, Master of the Undercity and Gangrene, the Horror twisted by Vestrial, *will be revealed in future products*." Now, as I have said before, I believe a meta-plot can be done well. Furthermore, the writers of ***Path of Deception*** did a very good job of ensuring that this particular bit of plotting can be ignored by referees, or delayed until such a time as a referee feels the need to make use of it. (The master villain's escape plan is quite ingenious.) Still, I resented being told, in effect, that I have to buy more stuff to find out what happens to Garron and Gangrene. It would have been much nicer if the writers had given me at least some vague idea of what to expect.
2. *Blank pages.* There are two completely blank pages at the end of the book. I still feel that ***Path of Deception*** is worth its price even with these blank pages. I just want more stuff. I was, however, glad that Living Room Games didn't follow some other companies' habit of filling up their blank space with advertising. Blank pages are a waste, but advertising is an *annoying* waste.
3. *Art.* The cover art is just bad. I also disliked some of the interior art. Most of the interior art is better than the cover, and none of it seems truly out of place relative to the text. Much of it reminds me of the ***Palladium FRPG***, which is not a positive association in my mind. There are no fewer than twenty-two illustrators credited in the front of the book, which results in a very wide variety of styles. If a unified "look" is your thing, look elsewhere.
4. *Index.* There was no index. In this instance I don't believe an index was absolutely needed, but with two blank pages, why not include one? It would be nice to have some sort of master reference to all the personalities

involved.

Now we'll go over the good stuff.

1. *Scripting.* The scripting of this product is just excellent. The plot is quite linear, something the writers admit in the adventure introduction, but it is not forced. Each step of the way is detailed clearly, with a wide array of possible deviations addressed. The goal of each adventure segment is delineated for the referee, and in most cases a variety of possible solutions is presented. The final battle, for example, offers up a palette of characters from which to select those most suited to challenge the party without automatically wiping the PC's out.
2. *Writing.* There is no brilliant artistry here, but there is no lack of good, solid communication. I never found myself trying to figure out what the heck the writers were driving at.
3. *Characters.* The cast of characters in **Path of Deception** is a delight. The villains are memorable, the bit parts are entertaining. The writers took the time to ensure that I understood what motivated whom. In fact, I sympathised with one of the primary villains quite strongly, and was sad to see him fall.
4. *Bonus Goodies.* Quite apart from the CD (described below), **Path of Deception** includes the new Bodyguard Discipline and a couple of really nifty magic items. The new discipline seems like a real winner, especially given its focus on making sure other people survive. What's especially nifty about the new magic items is that they are completely useless for any sort of combat, and pose little danger to play balance, but are nonetheless interesting. Whether or not I ever use **Path of Deception** for **Earthdawn**, those magic items are as good as swiped.
5. *The CD.* With the CD, which is designed for both Windows and Macintosh, you get everything you need to play **Earthdawn**, except the dice. The CD is mainly a data archive, encoded in HTML, with a character sheet in PDF format (which means those of you with Linux can access all its bounty with a minimum of fuss or bother). It includes a bunch of reference graphics, so you can see what an "Osidiman" looks like, and how the landscape of Parlainth differs from that of, say, Kaer Gardett. There's a search utility, a catalog of **Earthdawn** products, and links to various websites of interest. If you had any doubts as to the value of **Path of Deception**, this CD should blow them away.

So let's sum up, shall we? If you are a fan of **Earthdawn**, you want this product. It has new goodies in it, it is well-written, and it gives you an opportunity to ensure that the game you love will live again. If you have never played **Earthdawn**, but have an interest in a fantasy world unlike the generic feudalism found in most other fantasy worlds, you want this product. It is an inexpensive way to get into the game. Even if you have no interest in the **Earthdawn** line, **Path of Deception** is imminently suited for scavenging. In the final analysis, I rate **Path of Deception** a very solid 4 -- A Fine Addition to the Library. Plus, special thanks to Living Room Games for bringing back one of the best variations on the old theme of high, heroic fantasy. I'd never looked at **Earthdawn** before **Path of Deception** came my way, but you can bet it has got my attention now!

-- Montejon Smith

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Random Voting Thoughts

In case you didn't know, I live in Florida.

Tallahassee, the state capital, to be exact.

So, for those of you who keep up with politics, you know that our fair state is currently in the midst of a massive recounting. As I write this, given about 6,000,000 voters in Florida, 229 votes separate the two contenders for the presidency. (To put it in perspective, *three times* that number of people voted in last week's *Pyramid* poll . . . a poll where there was *only* one choice!)

Now, I admit to having been glued to the television for the past few days, so if this column is a bit disheveled, then I apologize in advance. "May you live in interesting times."

* * *

Realizing how few people will probably decide this election made me realize how few people decide the fate of some game lines.

Consider that an average small-to-medium press game may run about 3,000 copies. And how well that supplement sells can often determine whether or not another supplement will be created. And so on, and so on . . .

Now, in my days as a game shop clerk, I would often encounter folks who would not buy a particular RPG, book, or supplement. This happens for a number of reasons: because their friend/GM/player/whatever owned it and they read theirs, because they read a negative review of it, because they don't like the subject matter. While this is certainly understandable (games can be *expensive*!), I do feel the need to point out that each copy of a game *not* purchased possibly increases the chances of that game not surviving. Even if a game is not in danger of being discontinued in the big picture, if a Friendly Local Game Shop doesn't sell enough of a game's supplements, it may eventually scale back or even stop carrying the line, forcing you to special order or shop elsewhere.

Does this mean you need to buy supplements you don't want or that are awful? Of course not! But there *are* things you can do to make a difference to support your favorite line; for example:

- Keep track of items you might buy. If you tell your local game shop what supplements you want (or don't want) ahead of time, they'll be able to adjust their orders accordingly. So if you don't need Careerbook Webmonkey, let them know. (Trust me: trying to figure out how to order is a nigh-impossible job for a FLGS.)
- Write to the game manufacturers. For example, if you are unlikely to buy a supplement, but want to support the line, why not write and let them know (or talk to them at conventions)? A letter that offers concrete reasons why you don't like or want a product -- but what you *would* be interested in buying -- can go a long way with some creators. And, in this day of the information age, getting in touch with many companies is easier than ever.
- Recommend the games you *do* like. If your friends are enjoying a game, but they're bumming all your books, why not encourage them to pick up copies of their own? That should make the game go easier, and may make sure your favorite game line endures. (I calculated one time that our not-terribly-large shop was responsible for promoting and selling 1.5% of the entire run of one game . . . many of which I either bought and gave to friends or convinced my acquaintances to buy.)

I honestly believe that some games survive or die based on a tiny number of players.

* * *

I've really been amazed at the number of little plot points revealed during the week's developments. For example, the person who designed the controversial ballot for hotly-contested Palm Beach county was a Democrat, but may end up costing the Democratic candidate the presidency. And Pat Buchanan -- with whom I seem to agree about as often as a

two-headed calf is born -- admitted that the unprecedented number of votes he received from Palm Beach was probably the result of the poorly-designed ballot . . . causing me to mutter the previously-never-before-said-by-me statement, "Wow; that's really cool of Buchanan."

Which proves to me that, beyond party affiliations and ideologies, these stories are made up and decided by *people*.

It seems logical enough, but it's easy to forget. Not all setbacks are the result of moustache-twirling bad guys; mistakes happen. Happenstance alters nations. Not all bad guys are always bad. People are seldom entirely right or entirely wrong.

This last point is something I always tried to drive home when playing demons in **In Nomine**; they *can* (for the most part) do good, if they're so inclined. For example, if a demon likes a human, then helping that human may be a good thing. Likewise the do-gooder paladin can be a self-righteous pain in the butt.

Darth Vader may like kittens. The seemingly-wise priest could be a misogynist. Cthulhu might just want to be left alone. ("Darn those chanting cultists, always waking me up in the middle of the night . . .")

In the end, it's probably the little ironies, inconsistencies, and situations that provide the most grist for memorable incidents.

* * *

A lot is happening in Tallahassee. It's odd for me to see the national news turned onto buildings and backgrounds I frequently bike past. It's even stranger to see people I recognize from this city -- folks I've met -- talking on that national news, knowing that the entire country (if not world) is hanging on their every word.

So, in terms of gaming ideas, I realized how powerful the media is, and how surreal it can be. So, I wondered, how odd would it be for my PCs to be watching the news or other television, and to see themselves or someone they know . . . especially if it's live media?

"We're standing live outside a warehouse where two dozen runaway diseased monkeys have escaped into . . . "
"Hey; that building looks awfully familiar . . ."

"We have here security camera footage of the suspect who police believe is the Midtown Murderer."
"Um . . . Doc Amazing? You'd better come see this . . ."

* * *

If only one thing can be gleaned from this week, it's this: Anything can happen.

(I wonder if there's any new developments on the news . . .)

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Knightmare Chess**, Onslaught card.

(Four stars) " 'I thought the art was beautiful, classic Hard Eight™ work.' -- Elmore Vallejo"

Secret Histories Constructed While You Wait

"[T]here is something that secret histories give you that is very different, because you are trying to uncover the histories of groups and forces that always avoid history. In order to narrate those stories, you must become a little paranoid, though not in the sense that They are out to get you. I mean you must become a little paranoid as a critical method. You must start jumping across vague and shadowy realms of ambiguous data, weaving patterns that won't hold up in court, pointing out strange synchronicities that occur, names that reappear. Suddenly possibilities that exist outside of what we can conventionally narrate start to cohere, many of them bordering on the incorporeal and the imaginal. Patterns resonate in ways that seem to undermine conventional historical thinking itself."
-- Erik Davis, April 1997 interview

To one extent or another, of course, every one of these columns is not just gaming material, but GM advice of the world-building, scenery-painting sort. However, I usually leave the advice in the shadows and present the built world, the result of following said advice, on the outside. This week, since my topic is secret history (and a potentially conspiratorial secret history at that), I thought it might be interesting and instructive to reverse that -- to write this column with the advice in the light and the world in the shadows. Herewith, a Worked Example of secret historianship, a basic two-part primer on How To Suppress A Wild Transmission.

"The events of an interplanetary story -- aside from such tales as involve sheer poetic fantasy -- are best laid in the present, or represented as having occurred secretly or prehistorically in the past."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction"

To begin with, you need a high concept, a Central McGuffin to wind everything around. Otherwise, you're just throwing stuff in the air until the players get bored. For this example, I'm taking the Lovecraft quote above, which presents a vastly underutilized topic ideal for our purposes. If this were a conventional Suppressed Transmission, it would have started with that quote, rung four or five changes on it, and concluded with a paragraph Putting It All Together. That's basically what I do when I design a campaign frame, too, as you'll see here.

So our central gimmick is Secret Space Travel, down through history and at least potentially beginning in prehistoric times. Now, SF from James Hogan's *Inherit the Stars* to Jerry Pournelle's *Janissaries* to H. Beam Piper's Paratime sequence have postulated either an extraterrestrial origin for space-travelling humanity or an earlier human history of the solar system, or both. **Traveller** does the same, and perhaps it would be fun to run a **Traveller** game centered on a minor and forgotten Vilani base in ancient Egypt, or Maya Mexico, or on Atlantis. But that starts us out behind the curtain, playing an entirely different kind of secret history game, and I think the concept can support a classic Mismatched Ragtag Team Of Investigators Slowly Piecing Together The Uncanny Truth game. So, our secret space travellers are the conspiracy behind things, and just to keep things simple (and "interplanetary" rather than "interstellar") we'll further restrict ourself to Earth's solar system. (This will also help us avoid the worst of the causality-FTL paradoxes, too.)

There's another two basic questions to answer about our central gimmick, to inform the whole nature of play. Is our solar system basically as we understand it -- inhospitable planets inimical to PC life forms? Here's where gut feelings and aesthetics come in: to me, unless the game is set back when people didn't know what the planets were like (pre-1940, say), it feels like cheating to say "There really are dinosaurs on Venus, and the Soviets and NASA just covered it up." It's extremely implausible and may result in player dissatisfaction when the Big Secret is revealed. And, although a Victorian-era **GURPS Steampunk** game wherein the PCs investigate Her Majesty's Secret Space Service ("Ad Astra Sub Rosa") and its links to the Canal-Builders of Mars would be extremely swell, it would likely soon take on a very different flavor from our "classic" conspiratorial secret history model. So let's assume the solar system is (mostly) like Real Astronomy paints it, with only the necessary Shreds Of Dubious Evidence otherwise such as the Face on Mars or the "Castle" on [the Moon](#).

The second question goes to the nature of the space travel. Again, for purely aesthetic reasons, I want to stick with physical spaceships (if only to tie in UFO legends and run space battle scenarios). However, I don't want a technology with a lot of "spinoff" applications; some kind of bogus "zero-point energy" that's good for flying to Mars and maybe

building the odd pyramid, but unusable for a Babylonian Industrial Revolution, fits the bill. To further restrict it, let's make it depend on some rare unobtainium (Atlantean "orichalcum" will do for a start, methinks), which will also give us plenty of "treasure" to fight over, as well as good hooks for some opening scenarios:

- "Why was everyone in the house killed for a piece of costume jewelry from the 17th century?"
- "Who is kidnapping the great metallurgists of Europe?"
- "What possible reason would a shadowy Japanese consortium have for buying up the mineral rights around Roswell?"

We can restrict it again, keeping our spacefarers to a small conspiracy-sized batch. Perhaps even with orichalcum, you can only fully tap its zero-point potential after lengthy and rigorous training of mind and body. Insisting on a training regimen also gives a central core to all those "initiated" groups from the Templars to the Shaolin monks -- they were practicing space travel techniques. Space travel thus becomes the Secret of the "underground stream" passed down from the pyramid-builders to the Druids to the Illuminati, or however. It's always good when your Secret History can mesh with the secret histories crazy people have already built for you. (We'll pick from our embarrasment of Usual Suspects to focus the campaign further in a couple of paragraphs.) Another advantage of the "trained flier" mode is that we can then say that psionic "tuning" of zero-point energy can keep you alive (or build a "vibratory barrier dome") on inhospitable Mars, which gives us a little more leeway on that score for scenarios set there.

It's a little early to address this issue specifically, but it's always important to think about how to include the player characters. Nothing spoils a secret history faster than inaccessibility: either the PCs can never get traction on it, and wind up spinning their wheels forever; or once they do bust in, they find themselves dependent on NPC mentors, prisoners, or allies for exposition, information, and aid. The party becomes a tour group, rather than a Noble Company Of Adventurers. A GM who likes to live on the edge might ask the players to roll up their characters first ("It's a modern-day game, and everyone should have some tangential connection to espionage or UFO investigation.") and custom-fit the game to suit, but it's less stressful (and better for the campaign's flexibility and realism) to build a bunch of open slots into the background for PC life history hooks. For example, one of the PCs could have a period of "missing time" -- during which, she was trained by a secretive group of rebel conspirators. Or, a PC with a suitable background could find it more useful than he thought: "It turns out your training in the Star Lodge Blessing Way back on the reservation contained the key concepts for psionic orichalcum control. Imagine that." That way, the party can actually use the UFO tech and keep themselves alive in Crater Tycho, rather than depend on GM charity.

"The name of the game is 'Find Your Adversary.' Your adversary's game plan is to convince you that he does not exist."
-- William S. Burroughs

Now that we know "what," "where," and "how," we move on to "who" and "when." Well, we have all time and space. Since our space travel game is still primarily mechanical-physical rather than spiritual-etheric (although that concept can work for [a whole different campaign frame](#) of secret space-travel), we should begin with a technically-advanced civilization. One possibility is our own future selves, who traveled back in time to gain leverage in an interplanetary Time War, and thus wound up spreading primitive humanity hither and yon. Unfortunately, this means adding time travel, at least potentially, at the beginning, and I don't need to tell you, that opens up a whole keg of worms. Since you don't need time travel to start with (and can always introduce it later, with controllable wormhole gates or something), let's go the other direction: [ancient astronauts](#).

It's not immediately necessary to decide anything about the ancient astronauts, or even if they were human themselves. The name of the game is "secret-historical space travel," not "chariot-tracks of the gods." For starters, then, let's say that the ancient astronauts colonized the Tibetan plateau in, oh, 6000 B.C. Why Tibet? Well, Tibetan initiates are reputed to practice the exact kinds of body-control (keeping naked monks comfortable on Himalayan glaciers, that kind of thing) we'll need on Mars, and Tibet is cool. (If you have a lot of knowledge of or interest in some other Place of Mystery, swap it in here.) The ancient astronauts split in two groups; one of which went west to build pyramids and ziggurauts, and one of which went east to rule the natives as "sky dragons." At some point, catastrophe occurred and scattered the fragments of ancient astronautic knowledge hither and yon; the [Pole Shift](#), or interstellar war, or a rebellion of the natives. Possibly all three: maybe the Ur-Tibetan space activity drew the attention of some other power

(we'll call them the Sirians for now), who tilted the poles, bombarded the main ancient astronaut bases, and incited the natives to rebel. This also helps explain why the Initiates have kept space travel a secret; if they explore space too openly, they may bring the Sirians back again!

So we have a basic concept, a few key limitations on it, a Secret Origin, a Fall of the Gods, and at least one semi-plausible reason for secrecy. In a week, we'll finish our Secret History of Space Travel and talk about how to do it all over again in an emergency.

Next Week: Part Two; More Bad Guys, The Plot, Directions, Bisociation, and Novas.

?

by James Maliszewski

Art by Art Today and Colored by Keith Johnson

The Roaring 20's remain an enduring setting for a variety of roleplaying games; it's not hard to see why. The 1920's are modern enough to be familiar, but alien enough to retain an air of mystery. More importantly, they're rich with adventure possibilities. Everything from Prohibition and Fascism to archaeological discoveries and influenza epidemics make their appearance during this decade. It probably helps that many pulp stories are set in the 20's, making the era an obvious choice for tales of two-fisted action and adventure.

If the potential for adventure is paramount, there can be few places during the 20's that compete with China. In the span of just over a decade, this ancient nation goes from being a monarchy to a republic to a dictatorship to a welter of competing government, each vying for recognition and control. In the midst of this chaos is Shanghai, the so-called "Paris of the East" and home to criminals, Communists, and Westerners of a variety of stripes. It's thus a perfect locale for exciting adventures in the crumbling Middle Kingdom.

The intention of this article is to provide basic information on China during the period for Game Master running games like *Call of Cthulhu*, *Feng Shui*, *GURPS Cliffhangers*, *Wraith: The Great War* and others. In addition, the article offers more detailed information on the city of Shanghai, as it is an excellent setting for 1920's adventure. The information presented here is necessarily short and broad in its outlines. GMs interested in adding further depth should consult the bibliography at the end of the article.

(*Author's Note:* Throughout this article, I have used the Wade-Giles scheme for Romanizing Chinese names. I make no claim that this scheme is better or more accurate than the modern Pinyin. Rather, I have done so for verisimilitude. Pinyin did not exist during the 1920's and thus would not have been used.)

Modern Chinese History

In order to understand China in the 1920's, a brief examination of the turmoil of the previous two decades is necessary.

The Hundred Days Reform and the Boxer Rebellion

From June 11 to September 21, 1898, the emperor, Kuang-hsü (1875-1908), ordered a series of sweeping social and institutional reforms (the "Hundred Days Reforms"). These reforms reflected the thinking of a group of progressive scholars who had impressed the emperor with the urgency of innovation for China's continued survival. Influenced by similar Japanese reforms, the scholars declared China should follow suit. The imperial edicts

covered a broad range of subjects, including stamping out corruption and remaking many hallowed institutions. They also modernized agriculture, medicine, and mining, and promoted practical studies in place of hoary Confucianism. The court planned to send students abroad for firsthand observation and technical studies.

Opposition to reform was strongest among the ruling elite. Supported by traditionalists with the aid of the political opportunist Yüan Shih-kai, Dowager Empress T'zu-hsi engineered a coup d'état on September 21, 1898, forcing the young reform-minded Kuang-hsü into seclusion. T'zu-hsi then took over the government as regent. The reforms ended with the overturning of the new edicts and the execution of six of the reform's chief advocates.

The conservatives gave clandestine backing to an anti-foreign and anti-Christian movement known as I-ho ch'üan ("Righteous and Harmonious Fists"), better known in the West as "the Boxers." In 1900, Boxer bands spread across northern China, burning missions and killing Chinese Christians. In June of that same year, Boxers besieged the Western concessions in Peking and Tientsin, which provoked an allied relief expedition by the offended nations. The imperial government declared war against the Westerners, who easily crushed the Chinese army and occupied northern China. In the following decade, the victors imposed some reform measures. These included the abolition of Confucian-based examinations, educational and military modernization patterned after Japan, and an experiment in constitutional and parliamentary government. The speed and breadth of these reforms actually hindered their success. Ironically, one of their few unqualified successes was the creation of a modern army, which gave rise to the warlords who would seize power for years to come.

The Republican Revolution

The failure of reform convinced many Chinese the only real solution lay in a revolution that would sweep away the old order and erect a new one patterned preferably after the example of Japan. One such person was Sun Yat-sen, a republican activist who was popular among overseas Chinese and Chinese students abroad. In 1905, Sun founded the T'ung-meng hui (United League) in Tokyo. This movement, supported by overseas Chinese funds, also gained support from regional military officers and reformers who had fled China after the Hundred Days Reform. Sun's goals were threefold: "nationalism, democracy, and people's livelihood." Nationalism called for overthrowing the Manchurian Ch'ing dynasty and ending foreign hegemony over China. Democracy described Sun's goal of a popularly elected republican form of government. People's livelihood (or socialism) aimed to help the common people through regulation of the ownership of the means of production and land.

The republican revolution broke out among discontented modernized army units on October 10, 1911, in Wu-ch'ang, the capital of Hupei Province. The revolt quickly spread to neighboring cities, and T'ung-meng hui members throughout China rose in support of the revolutionary forces. By late November, fifteen of the twenty-four provinces had declared independence from the Ch'ing empire. A month later, Sun Yat-sen returned to China from the United States, where he had been raising funds among overseas Chinese and American sympathizers. On January 1, 1912, Sun was inaugurated in Nanking as the provisional president of the new Chinese republic.

Unfortunately, power in Peking had already passed to Yüan Shih-kai, the strongest regional military leader at the time. To prevent civil war and possible foreign intervention, Sun agreed to Yüan's demand that China be united under a Peking government headed by himself. The last Ch'ing emperor, the child P'u-i, abdicated and Yüan Shih-kai was sworn in as provisional president of the new Republic of China.

The Founding of the Kuomintang

The republic evolved slowly. The revolutionaries lacked an army, and the power of Yüan Shih-k'ai was greater than that of parliament. Yüan frequently amended the constitution, ruling as a dictator. In August 1912, Sung Chiao-jen, an associate of Sun, founded a new political party. This party, the Kuomintang (or KMT -- the National People's Party), was an alliance of several smaller parties. In national elections held in 1913 for the new parliament, Sung campaigned against Yüan's regime, and his party won a majority. In retaliation, Yüan had Sung assassinated, along with several generals sympathetic to the revolution. In the summer, seven southern provinces rebelled against Yüan. When Yüan put down the rebellion, Sun and his allies fled to Japan. A cowed parliament then formally elected Yüan president of the Republic of China. Soon thereafter, the Great Powers extended formal recognition to his government.

Soon Yüan Shih-k'ai ordered the Kuomintang disbanded and its members expelled from office. He suspended parliament and all provincial legislatures. He also promulgated a new constitution that made him president for life. However, Yüan's ambitions were still not satisfied. At the end of 1915, he announced he would reestablish the monarchy, with himself as emperor. Rebellions immediately broke out across China, and many provinces declared independence. While facing strong opposition, Yüan Shih-k'ai died of natural causes in June 1916, throwing the country into further turmoil.

Republicanism Reborn

Following Yüan's death, shifting alliances of regional warlords fought for control of the Peking government. The Japanese also threatened the nation. When World War I broke out, Japan sided with the Allies and seized German holdings in Shantung Province. In 1915, the Japanese proclaimed the so-called Twenty-One Demands, which made China a Japanese protectorate. The warlord government in Peking rejected some of these demands but yielded to the Japanese insistence on keeping Shantung. Peking also recognized Tokyo's authority over southern Manchuria and eastern Inner Mongolia.

When the Paris peace conference confirmed the Japanese claim to Shantung, Peking's capitulation became public. There were massive student demonstrations against the Peking government and Japan. The political fervor, student activism, and iconoclastic and reformist intellectual currents set in motion by the student protest developed into a national awakening known as the May Fourth Movement. In reaction, students returned from abroad advocating social and political theories ranging from complete Westernization of China to outright socialism.

The May Fourth Movement rekindles the dying embers of republicanism in China. In 1917, Sun Yat-sen became commander-in-chief of a military government in Canton in collaboration with southern warlords. He then reestablished the Kuomintang to counter the government in Peking. The latter, under a succession of warlords, still maintained its facade of legitimacy and relations with the West. By 1921, Sun had become president of the southern government. He spent his remaining years trying to consolidate his regime and achieve unity with the north. His efforts to obtain aid from the Western democracies were ignored, however, and he turned to the Soviet Union instead. For political expediency, however, the Soviets initiated a policy of support for both Sun and the newly established Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Nationalists and Communists

In 1922, the Kuomintang-warlord alliance in Canton was ruptured, and Sun fled to Shanghai. Sun thus needed Soviet support even more. In 1923 a joint statement by Sun and a Soviet representative in Shanghai pledged Soviet assistance for China's national unification. Soviet

advisers began to arrive in China to aid in the reorganization and consolidation of the Kuomintang along the lines of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The CCP was under instructions to cooperate with the Kuomintang. The CCP was still small at the time, having only 1500 by 1925, while the Kuomintang already had 150,000 members in 1922.

Soviet advisers also helped the Nationalists create a political institute to train propagandists. In 1923, they sent Ch'iang Kai-shek, one of Sun's lieutenants for several months' military and political study in Moscow. After Chiang's return, he participated in the establishment of the Whampoa Military Academy outside Canton, the seat of government under the Kuomintang-CCP alliance. In 1924, Chiang became head of the academy and began the rise to prominence that would make him Sun's successor as leader of the Kuomintang and the unifier of all China under a Nationalist government.

Sun Yat-sen died in March 1925, but the Nationalist movement was gaining momentum. Chiang, as commander-in-chief of the National Revolutionary Army, set out on the long-delayed Northern Expedition against the northern warlords. Within nine months, half of China had been conquered. However, the Kuomintang was now divided into left and right wing factions, and the Communist bloc within it was growing. In response, Chiang abruptly dismissed his Soviet advisers and emerged as Kuomintang leader. The Soviet Union, still hoping to prevent a split between Chiang and the CCP, nevertheless ordered Communist underground activities to facilitate the Northern Expedition.

In early 1927, the Kuomintang-CCP rivalry led to a split in the revolutionary ranks. The CCP and the left wing of the Kuomintang decided to move the seat of the Nationalist government from Canton to Wuhan. However, Ch'iang, whose Northern Expedition proved successful, set his forces to destroying the Shanghai CCP apparatus and established an anti-Communist government at Nanking. There now were three capitals in China: the internationally recognized warlord regime in Peking; the Communist and left wing Kuomintang regime at Wuhan; and the right-wing civilian-military regime at Nanking, which would remain the Nationalist capital for the next decade.

The Soviet cause was bankrupt. A new policy was instituted calling on the CCP to foment armed insurrections in urban and rural areas in preparation for a revolution. Unsuccessful attempts were made by Communists to take cities such as Nan-ch'ang, Ch'ang-sha, Shan-t'ou, and Canton, and peasants in Hunan Province staged an armed rural insurrection, known as the Autumn Harvest Uprising. Mao Tse-tung led the insurrection.

By mid-1927 the CCP was in dire straits. The Communists had been expelled from Wuhan by their left wing Kuomintang allies, who in turn were toppled by a military regime. By 1928, all of China was at least nominally under Chiang's control, and the Nanking government received international recognition as the sole legitimate government of China. The Nationalist government announced that in conformity with Sun Yat-sen's formula for the three stages of revolution -- military unification, political tutelage, and constitutional democracy -- China had reached the end of the first phase and would embark on the second, which would be under Kuomintang direction.

Shanghai

By the end of the 1920's, Shanghai was a bustling cosmopolitan metropolis, the fifth largest city in the world, and China's largest harbor and treaty port. The city was a world apart from the tradition-bound countryside that encompassed most of the country. Beneath its modern surface lurked a seedy and often dangerous world, one that

added the verb "to shanghai" to the English language, meaning "to induce or compel (someone) to do something, especially by fraud or force." Chinese leftists and Communists of the period saw the city as a bastion of evil, of wanton debauchery and rampant foreign imperialism -- in short, a city of shame.

Until 1943, Shanghai was a "treaty port," meaning that foreign powers maintained a legal presence in the city. The Chinese sections in the southern part of the city (a walled city) and in the far north (Chapei district) were cut off by two foreign "concessions," the International Settlement and the French Concession. In these concessions, Chinese and foreigners lived side by side but led separate lives. Nevertheless, the two worlds were bound together by bridges, tram and trolley routes, and other public streets built by Western powers that extended beyond the concession boundaries. The buildings in the concessions clearly proclaimed the Western presence: banks, hotels, churches, cinemas, coffeehouses, restaurants, deluxe apartments, and a racecourse. Many of the modern facilities of Shanghai's urban life were introduced to the concessions starting in the mid-nineteenth century: These included gaslight, electricity, telephones, running water, and automobiles. Thus, Shanghai had the infrastructure of a modern city even by Western standards by the beginning of the twentieth century.

Political Structure of Shanghai

As noted above, Shanghai was divided into three sectors. Each was virtually a sovereign jurisdiction with its own government, armed forces and police. The largest was the Chinese Municipality of Greater Shanghai, part of the Republic of China. However, this constituted only the periphery of the city proper. After the suppression of a Communist revolt in 1927, Ch'iang's Nanking government asserted its authority over all of Shanghai. However, he found that its control did not extend very far. Warlords and gangsters vied with one another -- as well with the central government and Chinese capitalists -- for power. Each regarded the foreign concessions in the center of the city with voracious envy.

The smaller of these, the French Concession, was a residential district near the river. It had a population of half a million in 1936, only a small fraction of whom were foreigners. Of these a mere 2500 were French nationals. There were also 12,000 Russian residents (mainly anti-Bolsheviks who had fled the Russian Civil War) and 2500 British. The French Consul-General ruled the concession with absolute authority, like divine right monarch. A municipal council (which he appointed) nominally assisted him. For security, the Consul-General possessed a force of 4000 gendarmes, most of whom were not French but Chinese or Vietnamese. The gendarmes maintained a very well informed political division as well as corrupt departments supposedly devoted to the suppression of drugs, gambling, and prostitution, but which actually derived considerable profits from these selfsame vices.

The heart of Shanghai, encompassing hundreds of factories, miles of wharfs and warehouses, as well as parks, clubs and hotels was the city's second foreign concession, the so-called International Settlement. This section possessed a population of approximately 1.2 million in 1936, of whom only about 40,000 were foreigners. Nevertheless, this minority had been the concession's rulers since its foundation in the nineteenth century. Unlike the French Concession, the International Settlement did not belong to any one power. In fact, the Settlement's "constitution," the Land Regulations, left several issues unclear, including the question of sovereignty.

Although a foreign colonial enclave, sovereignty in the Settlement remained theoretically Chinese. However, ratepayers limited its ruling body, the Shanghai Municipal Council. The ratepayers were a small group of property-owners, mainly British and Americans (as well as Japanese beginning in the late 1920s), dominated by the heads of the great British merchant houses and banks. The ratepayers met in a yearly public meeting to decide major issues and elect the Municipal Council. The Council's chief civil servant (almost always a British national) was thus one of the most powerful men in Shanghai. High property qualifications restricted voting rights to a small minority of the already small Western population. The Council admitted no political parties but political struggle in the Settlement was nevertheless intense. In the 1920s, it took two main forms: resistance by the foreign communities to the Chinese government's demands and growing conflict between Japan and the Western powers for control of the affairs of the Settlement.

Although "international" in name, the Settlement's Municipal Council was governed primarily by British interests. Until the late 20s, British and American councilors formed the majority. The Germans had possessed one seat until the

outbreak of World War I excluded them and awarded their seat to Japan, whose citizens formed the single largest foreign community in Shanghai. A second Japanese seat was added in 1927, and the Japanese continued to press for even greater representation. With their growing population and investment, they represented the future of Shanghai. Unsurprisingly, the native Chinese population had no say in the government of the Settlement at all until 1928, when three Chinese members were added to the Council's nine foreign members. Two more joined them in 1930. However, in keeping with the council's undemocratic nature, the Chinese members were not directly elected but nominated, in this case by the wealthy Chinese Ratepayers' Association, which represented local business interests.

Physical Structure of Shanghai

Shanghai offered a remarkable contrast between old and new, Eastern and Western. Interestingly, the native Shanghainese did not occupy only the old sections of the city and the Westerners only the new, as one might expect. Indeed, the notorious regulation that barred Chinese and dogs from Western parks was abolished in 1928, opening them to all residents, regardless of nationality.

The central locale of the foreign concessions was the Bund, a strip of embankment facing the Whampoo River at the entrance to the harbor. The imposing European-style banks and merchant houses on the Bund gave an appearance of solidity and permanence. Yet the city was constructed on what were quite literally shaky foundations. Many of its tallest structures were built on concrete rafts that floated on underlying mud flats. The Bund was not only the entrance point from the sea but also a window on British colonial power. The harbor skyline was dotted with edifices of British colonial institutions, prominent among being the British Consulate, the Shanghai Club (featuring "the longest bar in the world"), the Sassoon House (with its Cathay Hotel), the Customs House, and the Hong Kong and Shanghai Bank.

However, by the late 1920's, the era of Victorian glory was over; England was no longer the unchallenged master of world commerce. The United States of America had begun its imperial expansion into the Pacific region, following its conquest of the Philippines in 1898. The merger of the British and U.S. concessions into one International Settlement had occurred earlier, when U.S. power was dwarfed by the might of the British Empire. By the late 20s, Shanghai's International Settlement was the site of competing architectural styles. British neoclassical buildings dominated the skyline on the Bund, but new constructions in a more modern style exemplifying U.S. industrial power also appeared.

Shanghai's Population

Shanghai developed an extraordinary assortment of foreign communities: White and Red Russians, upper-crust 'Shanghailander' Britons, Baghdadi Jewish property tycoons, Korean gangsters, Filipino musicians, low-life cardsharps, pickpockets and assorted con-men. Criminals of various nationalities preyed on tourists at the Park, the Metropole and the Cathay hotels as well as on sailors and soldiers from half a dozen countries.

Even in superficially respectable areas glamor and poverty, beauty and squalor intertwined. At Ciro's Nightclub, the first in the city to have air-conditioning, British businessmen and Chinese mobsters tangoed with their wives or mistresses on most nights of the week. Outside, uniformed Russian doormen -- self-appointed Tsarist "generals" whose fake medals were purchased by the dozen in the Hongkew Market -- defended the club's patrons from hordes of deformed Chinese beggars. In less wholesome dancehalls and bars, lines of Russian "taxi-dancers" and Chinese "sing-song girls" sat waiting for customers. By 1936, it was estimated that one in every thirteen women in Shanghai was a prostitute.

Throughout the city, violence was a constant threat, whether in the form of political assassinations or gang warfare. The stained streets of Blood Alley (rue Chu Pao-san) in the French Concession bore witness to the frequency of brawls among foreign soldiers and sailors. "God owes an apology to Sodom and Gomorrah," according to an American Christian missionary who strove to combat the devil in Shanghai. A Chinese journalist agreed. Shanghai, he wrote, was "a city of forty-eight-story skyscrapers built upon twenty-four layers of hell."

Using this Setting

Shanghai offers many possibilities for Game Masters looking to add some exotic excitement to their 1920's era campaign. The history of China in the early twentieth century is one of contrasts. In about twenty-five years, the country goes from a decrepit monarchy to an unstable republic to a dictatorship to a collection of competing fiefdoms and finally to a nation unified under the Kuomintang. As a large city within China, Shanghai shows the effects of these changes very well, making it an ideal locale for adventure.

Because of its cosmopolitan nature, Shanghai could provide the backdrop for many different types of scenarios. Politics plays a significant role, as Communists plot against their Nationalist enemies, while imperialist Westerners and Japanese look on. Indeed, Shanghai could serve as a prime setting to highlight the rise of the Japanese Empire, ensuring its usefulness well into the 30s and 40s.

Beyond politics, Shanghai is a meeting place between East and West, making it perfect for games involving the occult or esotericism. Secret societies and other cabals would be right at home here. Likewise, the pulp adventure possibilities involving Chinese gangsters are many. Stories involving these mobsters would not be dissimilar to those in, say, Chicago or New York, but they have added appeal, as Asian aesthetics meets Western capitalism.

Here are but a small sampling of the adventures possible in Shanghai:

- A British member of the Municipal Council is murdered. Clues point to native Chinese democracy supporters, but is it that simple? Perhaps local Communists seek to spark an uprising against the "imperialists" or maybe Japanese agents are involved.
- A Chinese gangster possesses information vital to the characters' current mission. They must negotiate with the gangster for the information -- possibly doing him a favor in return for what they seek.
- A Soviet agent arrives in Shanghai to advise the CCP cell in the city, but he is kidnapped before he can make his rendezvous. Who is responsible? Nationalists? Western enemies of the Soviet Union? Or someone more sinister?
- An ancient Chinese vase goes up for auction in Shanghai. The characters must acquire it before Western occultists who believe it possesses magical power obtain it.
- A new secret society appears, one that attacks Westerners throughout the city. Is it the Boxers reborn or something else? And who is behind it?

Many more possibilities exist for the imaginative Game Master. Shanghai is at the center of so many currents of early modern history that it's certain to form the basis of many memorable adventures.

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by Seth Cohen

Art by Pat Ortega and Bob Walters

Playing *[Dino Hunt](#)* is fun, but a game for ages 8 and up can always use some alternate rules for adult players. After all, *Dino Hunt* is a collectible card game, and most CCG's involve deck design as a way to win. Here's some down & dirty variants for players who are skilled and want some more strategy in their game.

Variant Deck Design

Dino Hunt is ready to play for 2-4 players out of the box, and is easily expandable to 6 players with a supplement. There are two different ways to do deck design: one-deck play, as done with regular *Dino Hunt*, or each player can design and bring their own decks of Dinos and Specials.

You and your friends can each design your own deck of Dinos and Specials, and each player draws from their personal decks and discards to their own discard piles. If this is the case, cards that mention "the discard pile" now refer to *your* discard pile. Or, if your friends no longer trust you and your evil deck designs, everyone designs their decks, and then gives a list of dinos to the person hosting the game. The host will then pool those cards into a one-deck play design, and everyone draws from the common deck. This solves the problem of each player bringing a deck and shuffling cards into a common deck; *Dino Hunt* cards are an inconvenient size to sleeve, and most players will probably object to marking their cards to make identification simple. Everyone would keep their personal decks of Specials, to maximize their chances of capturing the dinosaurs they designed the deck for.

Since *Dino Hunt* has a point-based goal, there should be equality in deck design. It simply wouldn't be fair for your draw deck of dinos to be twice as large as your opponents'; as the game progressed, only you would have dinos left to hunt. As dino point values vary wildly, I recommend that Dino deck size be limited by point score, not number of dinos. Total points of dinosaurs to keep things at the half-hour to 45-minute game play length should be no more than 200 points. Divide that by the number of players to get the point value for your dino deck . . . or change that to suit your needs.

Dino Hunt doesn't specifically allow or disallow card trading; I always play it that if it isn't mentioned, it isn't allowed. However, if playing against folks with other decks, you might want to allow card trading during the game. This brings

another element of strategy in, and again increases the complexity of the game.

General Dino Hunt Strategy

As the mechanism for getting points is completely die-based, the odds of doing well on your turn depends on the dino you're hunting. A dino you can collect on a roll of 3, 4, 5, or 6 is better than a dino which can only be captured on a 6, even if the easy-to-hunt dinosaur is worth fewer points. And many dinosaurs are dangerous in some way or another; if you roll a 1 or 2, they can make your turn end, or do other unpleasant things. If you haven't already been applying these strategies, then you haven't been playing well. Of course, if you're lucky ("Who needs strategy? I always roll 6's when hunting dinos!") this information is useless to you. You should also focus in on the Specials you need. If your deck has a theme, include those Specials first, then fill out your deck with the range of Specials that are always useful to you or harmful to your opponents (depending on your style of play). And something people often forget: when you clean dinosaurs out of an era by capturing them, you get an extra Special! You'll be using more Specials in this variant-deck play, so don't forget any opportunity to grab one!

Also, to simplify play, rather than rolling a die to see how many dinosaurs you can place on your turn, you could do as the rules say for the first turn on *every* turn: place 4 dinos each turn. If you use a deck against your opponents and it wins, and you bring that deck back against them, don't be surprised if they've changed their deck designs to thwart yours. Don't be afraid to switch things around in between games.

I'll run through some theme deck ideas, and then mention other concepts you can add to those decks to change things from game to game.

Theme Decks

Theme Deck: Big Game Hunting

Take the Dinosaur cards you own. Separate out all the dinos worth 6 points or more, and leave out any Specials that mention low-point dinosaurs, or other cards that wouldn't be appropriate. This has the advantage of giving you high-point critters to hunt and also makes the turns go faster. Normal Dino Hunt play revolves around someone best deciding how to spend their energy each turn. With this variant, there are usually fewer dinos on the board at any given time, and many of the dinos out there are dangerous. You'll want to be strategic in your hunts. As the dinos are dangerous, you'll want to pack a Chronojacker in your Special deck. You might find it easier to kidnap dinos from the other players than to hunt them yourself, especially if you end your turn with lots of spare energy to burn.

Theme Deck: Land, Air, Sea

Ignore the rule about duplicate Experts if using this variant as a deck for all players; put it back in play if using separate decks. Give each player their choice of starting with Sure Shot Sam, the Jet Packs, or the Mini-Sub; or, if building decks, decide ahead of time which player will take which deck theme. Change the text on Sam so that he may only hunt land creatures, not flying or swimming ones. Each time you capture a dino using your Special, you get an extra point for your score. In this variant, you should have both equal numbers as well as equal points (give or take 10%...no need to be completely concerned about this) of dinosaurs who walk, fly & swim. There's no restrictions on what you can hunt...but of course, you'll have better luck if you use your Mini-Sub, Jet Packs, or Sure Shot Sam. If you play this variant and you find Sam to be too weak, you can give the poor boy some antihistamines and let him hunt in the

Cretaceous; if it turns out he's too strong (there tend to be more land than air or sea dinos) substitute the Super Stunner for Sam. Change the Stunner to allow use as often as you like, but it can only hunt land creatures. It has an energy cost, so its use is self-limiting. If the Jet Packs are too weak, then change it so that creatures captured by it have their score increased by one; do the same for the Mini-Sub if that too happens.

Theme Deck: Dangerous Dinos

This deck has a lot in common with the Big Game deck. However, things are even more cutthroat. Every dinosaur chosen must end your turn if you roll low. Also, every player gets a Chronojacker. If playing this as your deck vs. others' decks, you'll want to pack a Solar Collector, Favorable Chronowave, Free Ride, Lucky Shot, Power Cells and Radioactive Deposits. You want to have more energy than your opponents so that you can steal what they hunt. You might also want to kick them around the Time Track, so keep a few Timeslips around. If playing this as a single deck that everyone draws from, you won't be so concerned about beating up your opponent with Specials; you'll just be busy watching out for their attacks against you! Also, if you're doing Dangerous Dinos and your opponents aren't, then capture their dinosaurs and leave them with yours! You're specialized in capturing the dangerous ones and they aren't; you'll have a better success rate than they will.

Theme Deck: Building a Herd

You'll need lots of duplicate dinosaurs for this deck, as well as lots of copies of Mated Pair. You'll also want the specific Specials that give you extra points for owning a certain type of dinosaur. You won't need to pack too many of them, because the text on those cards is going to change. For example, Bonehead Battles normally gives you +5 to your point score if you collect a Pachycephalosaur. This type of card now gives you +1 point for *each* dinosaur of that type you collect in addition to their normal bonus. When doing this deck against other players, you should be sure you're not going up against someone who has built the same herd; the game won't be fun if you're fighting too much over the same dinosaurs with an opponent.

The person who comes up with the Mating Call will have a good time playing for herds of Hadrosaurs, so if you're not that person, don't forget to cause their gadget to Malfunction.

Theme Deck: Trophy Huntin'

No kids in the game, right? You're not using stunners any longer. The value of a deer head is based on the number of points on its horns. The same could go for the Ceratopsians. Score an extra point for each horn it has. (This works best as a one-deck design, so that everyone is going for the same goal.)

Additional ideas to add to any of these decks:

- **Carnivore Attack (derived from the Dino War variant on the back of one of the Energy Tracks):** Each time you capture a Carnivore, you may send it into a player's collection of won dinosaurs. You may have the Carnivore eat any dinosaur in his stack (discarding that card from the score pile into the discard pile), but you must put the Carnivore back in play, and you must end your turn. This will make game play a lot more vicious.
- **Bounty Huntin':** Each player randomly gets a card at the beginning of the game. You can either draw from the specials that mention a specific type of dinosaur, or simply draw randomly from the dino deck (I recommend the former, as the dino cards don't have secret backs). That way you have another way of gaining extra points during the game that doesn't match the theme of your deck, which will become obvious over the course of the game.

- **Uniqueness Counts:** You'll actually have to look at the back of the dino cards to figure out which cards fit the theme. You can choose any of these categories, or make up your own . . . after all, your playgroup has to agree to this alternate rule. Any dinosaur card that is particularly unique (only known from one fossil, the only one in its family of dinosaurs, the only one of its kind in the game [there's only one turtle, for example]) is worth extra points or allows you to draw an extra Special when captured. You could also go for other arbitrary measurements, such as size (large, small, heavy, light, etc.). Use your imagination, because the cards have lots of information.

- **Finding a Family:** the value of a Mated Pair card is doubled if you can also add a Baby dinosaur of the same species to your pair of captured dinosaurs.
- **New Specials or Dinosaurs:** If your play group agrees to it, you could design new cards (use old cards you're not going to miss). Playtest the cards using a one-deck game; that way, everyone gets a chance to try the cards out and see if their play balance is good. If the card is a new Special, and you want to try it out in a multi-deck game, you could give one copy to each player for their hand of Specials at the beginning of the game; you'd discover whether it was play-balanced very quickly.

Okay . . . now go hunt some dinosaurs! And Bring 'Em Back Alive!

by David Dickerson

Art by Dan Smith

Popular wisdom has it that the gaming habit does not survive adulthood. Many of us who were gamers in high school and college find that, when we get our first 40-hour-a-week job and perhaps a mortgage or a marriage, the gaming habit falls away. It's a sad thing to hear the wistful tones of people who once loved gaming but can't find time for it anymore. Often people will talk about having tried it once or twice, but finding themselves unable to sustain it. They mutter something about "you can't go home again" and sadly close the book on a hobby that once provided a great deal of pleasure.

This doesn't have to happen. But it does far too often. The reason for this, I suspect, is that the conditions under which most of us learn to roleplay -- high school and college -- are ones that afford us more free time than we ever see again. As a result, we tend to develop a roleplaying style that involves hanging out for hours, slowly meeting NPCs in town adventures or making our leisurely way through a room-by-room dungeon or a massively epic adventure, secure in the knowledge that whatever doesn't get finished can be picked up next week. After all, you have the time and no one's going anywhere.

Gaming in this milieu is a form of hanging out that actually seems to invite a time-wasting approach -- one that lends itself to very intricate game worlds modeled on all those bulky fantasy trilogies that have maps at the front, or sci-fi novels that have the answer to every technical question worked out in advance. The GM probably whiles away the idle hours during the week by adding new game-world information for fun, and the players (if they're anything like me and my friends were) make up characters that will never see use, just because they can. Random events (such as wandering monsters and binge shopping spress) occur all the time, sprinkled into the main action like pleasant detours along a scenic path.

This is all well and good for that life-stage, but if you try this as an adult, you're going to spend a few bored hours waiting for the excitement and then going home wondering if it was all worth the time. Usually it isn't.

What you need to do to survive the transition is to rethink your playing style. This is a fairly major shift that encompasses everything from session length to genre to player selection. Through the course of this article, I hope to lead you through a system that has worked for me. It involves a sacrifice or two, but in my experience the payoff is well worth it.

One: Premilinaries

Before you even start, you need to tell people you're starting, and feel out friends who might be interested. You'll also need a time and place. (I've found that Saturday afternoons -- say, 1-5 or 2-6 -- are excellent, even for busy people, since they've had time to get up and run some errands, but they can still go somewhere else for dinner dates and such.) Then, while you're looking at your pool of potentials and selecting candidates, you need to consider the following factors:

1. **Keep the Party Size Small.** In college, when everyone was simply hanging out, seven players was not an unheard-of size for a party. That won't wash anymore. Two to four players is all you should need. I find even in four-player sessions that usually one player doesn't get much to do. A fifth player should be avoided whenever possible, or should be as low-maintenance as possible to justify their inclusion. (Someone who just wants to show up and roll dice would be perfectly fine here; a fifth person who wants to be engaged with the game world will be too much of a time drain, and is bound to be disappointed anyway.) If you don't like turning people away, consider breaking them up. Running two satisfying three-person campaigns is often much easier than running one satisfying six-member one.

2. **Keep Player Expectations Modest.** Let people know you will not be running epic adventures. There will not necessarily be full-color maps, dressing in character, sound effects records in the background, etc. You will probably not lavish time composing paragraphs of evocative description to read aloud at key moments. The point is simple social entertainment, not fictive absorption.

   In a related note, don't expect this to last more than three or four weeks. If it happens, as it often does, then great. But it is hard to accomplish, even with this system, and it's better to keep your hopes modest than make grand plans and feel like a failure. Pretend your campaign is a mid-season replacement show. If it's popular enough to get picked up for an additional season, hooray. But a cancellation shouldn't surprise or upset anyone.

3. **Keep the Logistics Flexible.** You'll want one or two people you can count on to show up every week as your core group. (See point 5. below.) But after that, anything goes. This means that the party itself may not gel like the heroes of old (or, or that matter, like the ensembles on TV, who are at least paid for showing up). If you have four regulars and only two can make it one week, fine. Play with two.

4. **Don't Cancel Unless It's An Absolute Emergency.** I particularly recommend not cancelling for the first three weeks (getting commitments from people ahead of time helps), and *never* cancelling two weeks in a row. Ideally, you should have one or more PCs who are capable of GMing in a pinch, so that even if the GM has to leave town suddenly, the game itself can continue. This way, you establish a habit of meeting and people learn to trust that the game will be there if they just remember to show up.

5. **Have a Core Group.** As mentioned in 3. above, you'll want one or two players you can always count on to show up, and who you will play with even if no one else can make it. Choose people who don't travel for work, don't have family they frequently visit on the weekend, and so on. Homeowners and people with children (no offense if you're reading this and you're one of them) are often a bad risk, since their lives are at the mercy of one or more endless unpredictable sources of emergencies.

A Brief Word on Rules

Once you have your players set up, you'll have to establish the game system. But since the emphasis of the game is on speed and efficiency, the rule here is "Simplify, Simplify!" New players will not have time to read an entire *Players Manual*, and it would be laughable to expect someone to. Also, the game itself cannot be permitted to devolve into a discussion of whether someone firing a gun 15 hexes away gets a -1 for every 5 full hexes of distance or a -2 for every 10. In my ***GURPS*** campaign, optional rules such as Advanced Combat and called shots are only used if all the players know them well enough to agree on most numbers without looking them up. And any rule that slows things down is history, no matter how official it is. (My rule of thumb: when all action stops while at least two players are thumbing for a reference, it's time for a GM snap decision.) I try to limit all introductory information to 3-5 typed, single-spaced pages. Three pages on character creation and combat, and two pages on the actual game world we'll be adventuring in.

I supplement with additional stuff two or so pages at a time every game session, but those five pages should be all anyone actually needs to know in order to play.

Two: The Adventure Proper

Instead of going to books for your inspiration, start paying attention to T.V. shows -- particularly (but not exclusively) the fantasy/sci-fi genre shows like *Star Trek*, *Highlander*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, and the like. What makes them good models is that they do the same thing we try to do as adults playing RPGs: tell an interesting story in a compressed amount of time. The following guidelines are what I use when writing adventures for my fellow adults.

Have An A-Plot And A B-Plot

Most genre shows (in fact, most shows period) tell two stories simultaneously. One of these -- the "A-plot" -- is the main story of the episode; what it's theoretically about. The starship's engineer gets kidnapped by moronic aliens; the agents explore a haunted funhouse; the hero and the bad guy switch bodies for a few hours -- all of these are A-plots. They give the heroes some obvious thing to do, and they either succeed or fail. Either way, when the challenge is ended, you know the episode is over.

The B-plot is a secondary story that is usually more character-driven and is where the actual philosophical or emotional resonance comes in. (Read: roleplaying!) When the hero and the bad guy switch bodies, the hero learns how it feels to be judged on appearances, or sees life as the bad guy sees it, or has to answer questions about what constitutes identity. While exploring the funhouse, one of the agents has to cope with an impending visit from an estranged ex-lover, while the other agents wonder what the ex is going to be like. While the engineer is busy being kidnapped, the rescue party has to face the fact that the kidnappers have a legitimate grievance and find a way to come to terms. All of these deepen the original stories by giving the players challenges that they can't just fight, skill, or advantage their way out of.

I generally make the B-plot an excuse to emphasize a ***GURPS*** character's Disadvantages. This is where someone's Hunted or Dependent NPC come in. This is where a bout with Alcoholism or a Phobia can become a major plot issue. This is also what the best shows do: by making every episode relate in some way to the characters -- challenging their personalities or pasts -- every episode becomes important in some minor way. Your adventures mean more when they're not just "the time we fought the giant," but "the time we fought the giant, and Grundar the Barbarian discovered who his mother was."

If you're going to add a third plot (which some shows do), make it only take up two scenes or so. C-plots tend to resolve quickly, and are only just sizeable enough to feel that something has happened. I don't usually even bother with a third plot. PCs tend to create them on their own when faced with an open-ended situation. Which leads me to my second point . . .

Have A Loose Structure

TV shows do not usually have everything worked out in advance. The first episode presents you with some basic facts (what vampires are like, how space travel is set up, which kingdom is where) and the unanswered questions are left to be filled out as the show progresses. Obvious questions should of course be settled in advance. Less obvious questions (such as when a player asks, "What are the histories of all the rulers of all the baronies in this area?") should be answered with either "you don't know," or "I can't answer that this week, but fortunately it's not relevant at the moment and I'll get back to you." In many cases, TV shows have their details worked out, not by the official writers, but by talented fans (such as Captain Kirk's back story -- like his birth in Iowa and his middle name being Tiberius -- which was fleshed out by fans and eventually became canonized in the movies). So when I find that a player is particularly interested in some detail about the game world, I encourage them to make up whatever they think reasonable and show me what they've done later. A good player's work can save the GM lots of time, and it makes both GM and player more involved in the game.

This "loose structure" idea also affects the individual adventures. On a TV show, although theoreticaly anything can happen, what never changes is that you've got a teaser (that setup before the title sequence), three acts, and a closing sequence (right before the final credits). Similarly, I divide every adventure into 3-5 scenes, each of which is set up as an improvisation. For every scene I try to have one thing that *must* happen (in order to lead into the next scene), and a bunch of variables that I've only vaguely predetermined. So, for example, if the characters meet a woodsman who bears a birthmark revealing that he might be the emperor's long-lost twin, and if that's the core of the story I have planned, then of course there's no point in leaving it to chance: the guy's sleeve drops open as he shakes their hand, someone notices the birthmark, and we're off. It may *look* random, but it isn't: I simply ask everyone to make perception rolls, and whoever makes it most readily is informed of the mark.

But if that's all the players get, you're going to waste some time. Each "must" moment should also contain at least one obvious follow-up action -- in this case, maybe they met an agent earlier who is looking for the emperor's twin, but the players don't know if he wants to kill the twin, embrace the twin, or try to pull some Byzantine switcheroo. In any event, a return to the inn where the imperial agent is staying -- either to talk or to spy -- would be the next obvious course. Although it can be tricky to motivate players, I have found it generally safe to say that most players seek pleasure and avoid pain, and try to do the same thing for NPCs that they like if it's not asking too much. Don't count on pure altruism to motivate uyour players or it'll just break your heart, and don't expect them to leap at a fascinating puzzle if it looks like it'll be hard to solve and doesn't have a sure and magnificent payoff. If your players aren't doing what you want, you either need a bigger stick or a sweeter carrot.

Once they're motivated, don't mess around. Part of the concept of "structure" involves getting players where they need to be with a minimum of distractions. Do it like TV: when they decide to go back to the inn, *Poof!* -- the next scene is at the inn. Don't describe each individual building as the characters wander through town, don't roll for wandering monsters, don't roleplay the part where they stop to buy rope on the way, don't deny information until just the right question is asked and don't randomize a damn thing. You'll just waste time on irrelevancies, which will dilute the impact of your nice story.

That's the "structure" part; the "loose" part is that I never presuppose that the players have to get along with the NPCs, or that some player might not do something disastrous. (Note, by the way, that you can almost always prevent the players from committing a killing by having an innocent eyewitness show up unexpectedly at a safe enough distance to run away and call the cops. Happens in the movies all the time.) To cite my previous example, once the players get to the inn, how they aproach the agent is entirely up to them . . . but one way or another, they're also going to come across a letter from the emperor's wife, whether he has to leave it in his room or keep it on his body. As long as the one "must" element occurs, the adventure can continue and things are happy. If you had a really nice dramatic effect that the players missed, you can always tell them about it afterward instead of shoehorning them into doing what's perfect.

A final note that deserves separate mention: I never put any kind of "must" occurrence in the final climactic scene of an adventure. If someone dies, okay. If a valuable item is broken or lost, that's what happened. If someone manages to reasonably acquire an item of extreme power, I roll with it. That's a concern for next week. For the purposes of the individual adventure, however, I try to never have any preconceived notion of how it's going to end. I just try to make the entire situation as potentially clear to my players as possible and let them decide how to deal with it.

Establish a Pattern and Then Break It

Almost every genre TV show spends its first several episodes establishing the pattern of its default story. An anomaly shows up in Missouri, Mulder and Scully go and get baffled by it up close, then they go home and the episode ends on an uncertain note. A planet sends out a distress call, the Enterprise answers, they correct the culture, beam back to the ship, and end with a joke that provides closure. Whatever your "episodes" are going to be like, you should be trying in your first few sessions to establish a consistent world and a consistent way of interacting with that world.

Then, by episode/adventure four, you can start playing with the players' expectations. The players encounter a member of a "bad" alien race who happens to be good! Someone invents an exception to the laws of magic that affects a PC wizard! The town that is the player's home winds up invaded! One of the players discovers they're really a clone! In a

long, deliberately paced campaign, major changes can have terrible impact on everything the GM has been thinking through. In a short-term campaign where the game world is open-ended anyway, it's much easier to do dramatic things to the entire game world and not face disastrous consequences. So do it, and have fun!

An adventure like this is a good time, by the way, to break another rule: don't worry about doing it all in one session. Think of a major story like this as a "special two-part episode." But remember that it has to *feel* like a two-part episode: that is, the first episode has to build to a climactic, cliffhanger revelation that leaves everyone wondering what the devil is going to happen in the second adventure. Expanding to a second session just because you made the dungeon too large to get through is a crappy thing to do to your players. If you have to interrupt the game because of time problems, you'd better make the halfway point exciting somehow. You want them tuning in next week because of anticipation and wonder, not out of duty and a desire to get it over with.

This guideline applies on the individual PC level as well. Most characters naturally fall into certain high-concept one-sentence patterns: The Strong Guy Who's Emotionless; The Sneak Thief With a Past; The Wacky Dilettante Who Causes Trouble. When players first make their characters, the first few adventures ought to establish exactly the expertise that they designed their characters to exercise. The Brain should be supplied information readily. The Brute should have some wussies to beat up. The Trickster should be able to trick someone pompous and powerful. And all of this should happen fairly publicly so word gets around about our heroes. Then, once these patterns are established, you can start to mess with the different characters' self-conceptions and public reputations. TV shows do this all the time -- establishing character stereotypes, underlining them for a few episodes, and then, once the expectations are established, violating them in some way. But the last step is only entertaining if the character stereotypes are already in place. The sooner you provide opportunities for the players to perform their characters for each other, the sooner you'll be able to have fun messing with them later.

Give Everyone Something To Do

This is why the party size has to remain small. Ensemble TV shows can occasionally afford to let one or more characters take a back seat now and then, giving them only one line and a brief walk-on. That can't happen here. Since everyone has bothered to take the trouble and come, the least you can do is make them all important to the story in some way. Combat-oriented characters are easy to please here -- just throw in some combat and they're bound to shine. (See point 5., below.) But in practice, what this means is that within each adventure I try to have two reactions rolls and at least two skill rolls every time -- featuring at least one Contest of Skills (for all you *GURPS* players) whenever possible.

Note that this doesn't mean that players have to be *good* at something to matter. They can also have their peculiarities and ineptitudes showcased, just as long as they personally affect the adventure in some way. What is important is that the players be challenged and happy. Try to have each of them cry "Oh no!" at least once per game ("How can I pick the lock when my hand's in a cast?"), and then (if appropriate) cheer triumphantly as all the NPCs see how cool they are.

What this also means is that you, the GM, have to have options and back-up plans. If you "must" have someone to pick a lock in order for the characters to continue, and only one player has lockpicking skill, then when this player picks the lock they're going to feel like they're not really acting on their own, but simply serving a plot that's already outlined for them. And if that's the only skill they use all adventure, they're not going to be happy. But if the player's skill is optional somehow (the party has to face the evil cultists anyway, but it'll be easier if they can open a lock and get access to niftier weapons), then the roll actually matters more. I generally try to come up with three plot options for every reaction roll (bad, good, terrific) and two options for every skill roll (success, failure). And I never make these rolls central to the adventure's continuance.

Always Feature Sex Or Violence

Perhaps this should read "desire and conflict," but the point is the same. Although there is a tendency for the authors of articles like this to go on about the importance of roleplaying over combat, what's often overlooked is that talky, peaceful, character-driven adventures almost never work. This is because the episodes we see on TV always feature

the gradual revelation of certain qualities in a character we're trying to get to know. ("Will Amanda ever reconcile herself with her grandmother and yet continue to grow as an artist?") In a gaming situation, all the characters know themselves already, and self-revelations are unlikely to deviate much from a character's initial conception. Another problem is that dialogue is tricky to write, and while it's possible to carefully time a revelation or statement when you're in control of every character, this same power is almost entirely absent when you're simply improvising, and as a result true dramatic impact rarely happens. It's great when it works, but as a former improv comic, I can confidently state that unless you have a terrific team that meshes well together, the occasional payoffs are not worth the time spent on misfires.

This is why I emphasize the importance of examining genre shows as opposed to mainstream family dramas. (Note, by the way, that even non-genre shows like hospital dramas, police dramas, and melodramas all feature love stories set on a framework of life-or-death A plots.) Genre shows tend to have more thinly drawn characters (after all these years, we still know very little about McCoy's family life, voting record, or taste in music) and play instead to the genre's strengths -- visual flashiness, the monstrous and the nefarious, big dangers limned in broad dramatic strokes. An episode of Highlander that doesn't feature swordplay is a true rarity, and Buffy always fights something, even if it's not a major part of the story.

In mimicking this, I try to schedule at least two combats in every adventure: one or two small ones that last no more than two or three rounds, and one climactic one that can end any way the dice see fit. I try to make the small ones avoidable with the appropriate actions (be it clever avoidance, capitulation, high reaction rolls, or bribery). If they take too long -- more than three rounds, or two if it's not a very interesting fight -- then the bad guys either begin to fall easily or run away. (They're usually not out to kill the heroes anyway; they're testing their strength or sending a message or something.)

Since this makes combat a little rarer than in the pre-adult years where you roll dice to beat up kobolds every half an hour, it's worth it to try to make every fight scene different and specific somehow. Have rain obscure everyone's vision! Make a barrel spill slippery stuff on the floor! Turn out the lights and put them near a gas tank! Ruin their ammo and force them to pick up a nearby axe! Anything that affects a character's competency in a battle -- making a sure thing less sure or making a scary opponent more takeable -- is worth choreographing. Figure out the modifiers in advance so you won't have to turn to books in the middle of a fight. Develop an environment that enables the players to select options about how to fight instead of just automatically doing what they always do. They'll thank you for it later.

I also try to make desire part of every scene -- the characters want something, and the NPCs want something else, even if it's something as simple as wanting this conversation to end so the NPC can go to the restroom. Actual sexual situations can be tough to pull off -- especially if you're all straight males and you're uncomfortable adopting cross-gender roles in public view -- but an undercurrent of sexual attraction is often surprisingly motivating. Playing on disadvantages helps here: an ugly sorceress will almost never refuse an invitation for dalliance with a blind man who finds her funny; a greedy gladiator will happily spend the night in a rich woman's room -- and might even countenance an offer of marriage!

Generally speaking, however, violence is an A plot and sex is a B plot. Life and death questions are the most important ones to resolve; after that come considerations about the quality of that life and who you'd prefer to spend parts of it with. In fact, as relationships and sex develop over the life of a campgain, fandom becomes more important and helpful . . .

Encourage Fandom

Thanks to *Star Trek*, every genre show with its head on straight tries to establish a room for fandom -- often a chatroom or e-mail list. This gives the fans a chance to discuss questions about the characters, speculate about upcoming episodes, trade rumors, and in general keep love for the show alive in those 167 hours every week when it's not actually airing. This can have a similar salubrious effect on a campaign as well. I set up an e-mail list for all the players to share, and I try to send out one update every week -- just a paragraph or two -- about what's happening in the campaign. This includes announcements that are both "in character" (Castle Banwyck is reported to be under siege

300 miles to the north) and "out of character" (we're meeting at Steve's this week but his air conditioner's not working so dress accordingly).

This is an opportunity both for the GM and for the players. The GM can fill in game-world information that would be too time-consuming or irrelevant to bring up in an actual session. (The disposition of current politics, who just got promoted, what the weather's been like lately.) And the players can communicate privately to the GM with details about their off-time activities (this is a chance to use *GURPS* job success tables and training rules), and can role-play things like love scenes and secret agendas that are awkard or inappropriate for the larger group. If you have a small enough group, this isn't much of an imposition.

Obviously, though, this is an idea that asks for a little more time commitment than usual, and I've found that some players (often those with boring day jobs that allow them to goof off at their computers) will overuse the system if you give them the merest chance, tying up time you need for other parts of your life. So I try to make it clear that I will accept only one e-mail per week, and that it may describe no more than two relatively simple actions that the player is engaging in -- or one complicated action if it's important enough to work out in a short mini-adventure. (By the way, I never roll dice in a mini-adventure. I just decide on a narratively pleasing result and negotiate later if the player objects to something.)

Final Thoughts

As I mentioned earlier, I plan for three-hour sessions and accept it if it goes for four. I figure the length of my adventure according to the following rough formulas:

- NPC encounter: 15-30 minutes.
- Short combat: 20-40 minutes.
- Big climactic combat: 45-75 minutes.
- Figuring out a plan for what to do next: 30 minutes to 1 hour or more.

The system still isn't perfect, but I have found that the TV-efficiency model I have just described has turned the gaming sessions with my adult friends from sporadically interesting seven-hour marathons that are impossible to maintain from week to week into punchier crowd-pleasing sessions that actually last two to three months before collapsing. I like to imagine that one day I may eventually come up with a gameworld so enticing that it takes on a life of its own, inspiring fan fiction, T-shirts, in-joke bumper stickers and (maybe someday) a convention. For the time being, though, I'm just glad to be able to give my friends an opportunity to wedge in some role-playing entertainment in the midst of all the other demands adult life places on us. I hope it does the same for you, too.

Pyramid Pick

Faces

Published by **InterQuest**

CD-Rom software for Windows '95 and Macintosh; $49.95

Real life often blesses gamers with handy tools for their hobby. The drafting and graphic arts industries have graciously provided us with all sorts of devices and techniques that enrich our gaming experience. Now we get to steal from the police.

InterQuest has created a software package for law enforcement agencies to facilitate the creation and communication of composite pictures. The user interface is an incredibly easy to use point and click configuration. The software, called *Faces*, is available for Macintosh and Windows operating systems, and retails for $49.95 (US). Depending upon your gaming needs, it can be worth every penny.

Faces has a library of almost 4,000 facial features. The combination of features is impressive; faces will have different head shapes, necks, eyes, eyebrows, eye lines, mustaches, beards, forehead lines, sunglasses, hairstyles, hats, lips, and chin lines. That said, when a GM starts churning out pictures of non player characters to wow and amaze his players, some features seem to pop up a lot. In particular, my players and fellow GMs have found that the choices of hair styles could stand to be expanded. There are a number of choices, including various lengths and genders, plus options for balding, afros, and hats, but there are only about a dozen choices for short male hairstyle. Depending on the choice of jaw shape, beard choices may be somewhat limited, but the program separates mustaches and beards into separate features, increasing the variety of combinations.

Skin color is handled pragmatically. The program uses a universal skin color which is the same for all races and complexions. This approach works better than it sounds. In practice, a face crafted with African-American features will look like a light skinned African-American. Further processing via your favorite photoshop software can produce darker and lighter complexions with some success, but it is not necessary to achieve the desired effect.

Pictures must be exported from the program for further modification via photoshop software and for posting the image elsewhere. Unfortunately the program only provides one format for export, but fortunately it is a bitmap format for Windows (PIC for Macintosh), which is highly versatile and should be directly importable into any image processing software. One little annoyance is that the pictures have a little iQ logo stamped on the bottom right of the neck of images that are exported. Users have successfully rid themselves of these stamps with Photoshop software, and my favorite solution is to layer some appropriate image over the stamp, such as a relevant insignia or clan mon.

The problem of sending pictures back and forth has been handled well in *Faces*. For communication between two *Faces* users, InterQuest has created the InterCode system. All pictures created with the program are represented by a string of about forty alphanumeric characters. Any *Faces* program can translate these characters

back into the portrait. This makes for extremely low bandwidth transmission of pictures across the internet.

Obtaining pictures of NPCs and player characters (PCs) through conventional means can be time consuming and expensive. The cheapest way is to look at random pictures or pictures of celebrities and pick one. A generally more expensive route is having an artist create a portrait of a character. Neither one is appealing for a GM that will be introducing ten new NPCs per session. *Faces* is incredibly easy to use. After you have crafted a about a dozen faces, the process is very quick. A new face can be generated within a few minutes. Another option in the software is a random face generator. This usually produces monstrous freaks of nature, but can occasionally generate a good starting point for a new face. The feature is intended for use of the software as an observation game.

Gamers that have never used pictures for characters may dismiss the value of such portraits. The picture has two very clear benefits. The person playing the character, whether a player or GM, has a visible reminder of what the character looks like. More importantly, other people have something to look at instead of the gamer when imagining what the character is saying. This is invaluable when the character is a different gender, race, and/or build. The players and GMs that I know that use it all agree that the pictures are a great aid to role playing, but the price tag makes it more appropriate for a GM purchase.

Faces was written for the modern world, and it is best used for that genre. There are no pointy ears, horns, or other bestial features. Clothing and dress are not shown in the pictures, but the dominant hairstyles and sunglasses are styles of the last half century so the utility decreases for eras with distinctly different period fashions. However, humans pop up in all genres and even in games with a plethora of aliens, at least the faces of human PCs will be easy to make.

The gamers that I know aside from myself that have purchased *Faces* are all GMs and have made scores of faces with the software. We all agree that the software was more than worth what it cost. Players enjoy the faces as a prop and role playing aid for themselves and for the many NPCs that are paraded before them. It especially helps PCs remember when they are talking to a thick-necked bouncer that can eat their head. *Faces* has been a great boon to my gaming and, in spite of its limitations, is a good buy.

-- Michael J. Casavant

Pyramid Review

King Arthur Pendragon: Book of Knights

Published by Green Knight Publishing

Written by Peter Corless

48 b&w pages; $7.95

Quick Start versions of older, large, complex games have become the rage over the last year or so, and this book is Green Knight's entry for their *Pendragon* game. These supplements must be examined with an eye toward both experienced and inexperienced players. The book itself utilizes a small print (10 point), and there are few graphics (about one picture every three pages not counting tables), but the work is original (at least I don't recognize it from other *Pendragon* books) and contributes to the text, so you get a lot of words for your money.

Like other Quick Start supplements, this one includes an introduction to roleplaying, presents the world of the game, concentrates on character generation, and provides the simplest mechanical aspects of the game (combat, action resolution, competitive skill use, and a brief overview of experience). *Book of Knights* restricts introductory material to the first 8 pages (after the table of contents), it covers the world of 6th century Britain and the role of the knight in the world of *Pendragon* succinctly, and even manages to expand on the descriptions given in the 4th edition rulebook. Character generation is covered in the next fourteen pages, presenting an abridged generation sequence but reminds users that far more extensive and complete rules can be found in the cultural sourcebooks (*Pagan Shore* (Irish), *Land of Giants* (Scandinavian), *Beyond the Wall* (Picts) and *Saxons!*). Two sample characters follow, and the final page gives sample minor NPC/monster statistics. The mechanics of the game take eighteen pages and experience is described in two.

Character generation is somewhat different from the system presented in the 4th edition rulebook and as it has been expanded in the sourcebooks. Traditionally there has been a long series of decisions or die rolls to explore where a *Pendragon* character fits into his world, this supplement replaces most of the roll-here-to-see-where-to-go-next tables with a handful of choose-one-from-column-A-and-one-from-column-B tables. This speeds up the generation of characters, but eliminates some of the organic flow and thoroughness of the original system. Furthermore, by unifying some of the tables, the uniqueness of the various cultures that form the world of King Arthur is lost. While not a problem for new players, old players will want to use the complete system. If you are an experienced player looking to replace *Knights Adventurous* as a character generation adjunct-book, then look elsewhere -- this is not it.

One of the great aspects of Pendragon is its devotion to historical heraldry. It receives only two pages at the end of character generation; however, this overview is simple but not simplified. The rules are explained, and include instructions for designing a coat of arms for your character. There is one page showing the components and vocabulary of heraldry that is far more illustrative and instructive than the two pages given in the 4th edition rulebook (experienced players, take note). Cadency (a system for changing or differentiating a coat of arms for the sons of a knight) receives its first exposure in *Pendragon*, and makes for a welcome addition.

Pendragon is a primitive game; there are separate mechanics for each kind of task (skill use, trait checks, combat skill use, etc.). *Book of Knights* explains them all in clear concise terms. It also expands on some of the rules, especially how the Honor Trait is used, and also includes several new options for actions in combat. Experienced players will want to explore these new options including: the "Double Feint," which allows a dagger-user to bypass armor, and

expanded rules for barding and armor. The section explaining skill use is more concise than in the 4th edition rulebook and may prove more helpful to experienced players than the original rulebook itself.

Players new to the game and GMs introducing the game to them will find this introduction enough to explain the game and to get started with a game. Although, as always, an experienced GM improves the experience. I think that the simplifications that were made for this book (especially in the character generation area) will not restrict the players from graduating on to the full game -- although some may feel cheated out of the experience of making a *Pendragon* character using the full system.

Experienced players will also benefit from this supplement, and not much less than a neophyte. The expanded explanation of heraldry, expanded combat options, and tight presentation of game mechanics all combine to make this book a good addition to the library of any *Pendragon* player. It almost looks like the beginnings of a new edition. For the price, GMs may consider requesting that players acquire the book just to save wear and tear on their copies.

-- Rob Kamm

Pyramid Pick

Library of Bletherad (for Palladium Fantasy RPG)

Published by **Palladium Books**

Written by Bill Coffin

160 pages; $16.95

Library of Bletherad marks Bill Coffin's latest addition to the slowly growing *Palladium Fantasy RPG* line. Although the books for this series are a bit fewer and further between than those in the *Rifts* series, Coffin has been able to deliver us yet another book that has been well worth the wait.

Library of Bletherad is more or less a compendium of miscellaneous adventure material weaved together through the fabled Library of Bletherad. The library boasts a legendary collection of books, which by far outrivals any other in the *Palladium* world. Coffin presents the different adventure material in this sourcebook by telling of the strange things found in some of these wondrous tomes. As this book demonstrates, the Library of Bletherad is an ideal jumping off point for any adventure.

The first third of the book details the history of the library, the major players connected with it, and the many ways in which the players might become involved. As Coffin explains, the Library of Bletherad (so named for the city in which it resides) is one of the descendants of a grand and mythical library known as The Prime Incunabula. The Incunabula was destroyed centuries ago, and the Library of Bletherad is the only known surviving descendant. The library's history has been rocky and fraught with strife since well before its construction. Those destructive forces, known as the Zealots, who destroyed the Incunabula have also sought to undermine the Library of Bletherad. The peaceful Monastic Order of Bletherad, an order of pacifistic scholarly monks, watches over the library and fights to preserve it for future generations. However, their job is not an easy one. The monks who guard the library are not entirely unified in their efforts to protect the library, nor are the antagonistic Zealots entirely coordinated in their efforts to destroy it.

True to Coffin's style, the library's situation is nowhere near as simple as this basic outline implies. We learn of some of the mysteries involved with the library as well as of the secret societies found there -- the Guardians of Bletherad and the Morphean Fellowship -- both of whom make it their duty to step forth and fight the Zealots and other troublemakers with a vengeance, a vengeance that the peaceful monks are afraid to exude.

This section also explores the library and the area around it. The two major cities of the island are detailed, as well as the many mysteries and potentials for adventure that they contain. And, of course, the library itself is also mapped out. The first thing one will note about the library is that it is absolutely huge. It contains more books than one could read in a dozen lifetimes, and in those books one will find information on just about anything. The library is a large, round structure with grand, yet subtle architecture and about ten total floors, each packed with stuff to explore. The top five floors contain primarily books, all organized by a very simple and meticulous system. The bottom five floors are basements, only the first of which is in use. The other four are locked up, leaving plenty of potential for additional mystery and adventure within the library.

One important section of the sourcebook to note is the one on *The Carbunculum*. This is a tome of mysterious origins that has been making its way into the hands of adventurers all across the realms. It is basically an adventurer's guide to the Library of Bletherad, written by an apparent trickster. Most of its material is false and misleading, making

promises of grand treasure, such as ancient spell books and treasure maps, just lying out in the open for adventurers to discover. For the most part this has done little more than provide a large thorn in the sides of the librarians as they attempt to guide, properly inform, and keep a lid on these wandering (and often disruptive) visitors. However, Coffin makes a note that there might be a few kernels of truth within the tome, making it usable as an ideal plot hook for drawing the players into the library and launching an adventure from there. I don't know if that quite justifies the sixteen pages of text that this book receives, but it is done in quite a bit of detail, with plenty of leads to follow up on.

The second two thirds of the book are a collection of miscellaneous material that can be incorporated into any campaign. GMs will find things such as new spells, new monsters, new items, maps, and many other things that will prove more than useful. The paradigm that these items are presented through is that of books. Coffin provides stats and details for the items found in over a dozen books that may be found within the library. The books themselves are linked together with a common story that ties itself into the history of the library as a whole. They are all survivors from another library that was a descendant of the original Prime Incunabula. It is a descendant that was thought to have ben destroyed centuries ago, a fact that throws a lot of things into question and provides even more potential for adventure. It should be noted that the material presented here need not necessarily be discovered or encountered through the library in any way. These are books about rare things, things that the adventurers might encounter on their own anywhere in the world. This in turn means that GMs don't necessarily have to incorporate the library into their campaigns if they don't want to; the source material can easily be used separately.

The first part details a set of spell books, and Coffin gives us several sets of new spells each from exotic and largely forgotten schools of magic. We are given new ice magic spells, new spirit magic spells, new shadow magic spells, and several others. All of the spells are pretty good, and a few of them are really, really cool. Aside from the main **Palladium Fantasy** game book, there hasn't been too much support in the form of new spells in this game. Finally, spell casters will have something new and exciting to add to their spell retinue.

The next section provides details on a bunch of legendary rune weapons and rune artifacts. Unlike many of the rune weapons in previous source books, no punches are pulled here at all. These are truly powerful weapons, which will add an interesting and dynamic element to any campaign. Aside from just giving stats, Coffin makes sure to give us thorough and interesting histories for each item, making them ideal for incorporation into a campaign.

A summoner will find his or her delight with *The Journals of Sir Garrydyn*. It's a collection of information on thirty-three demons and thirty-three deevils, including their true names. Complete stats are given for three demon and three deevil lords. However, for those with less sinister tastes, there's a catalog of new monsters and strange creatures in *The Brass Menagerie*. Some of them are simple, straight-forward monsters, while others are complex and interesting creatures that provide a lot of potential for GMs. Of particular note are the Yin Lords, a race of strange, yet benevolent snake-like humanoids who are struggling to find their place in a world that is likely to reject them.

The rest of the source book is rounded out with details of some more mundane, but still quite useful, items and topics. Coffin actually manages to make coinage a somewhat interesting topic while giving us the lowdown on the types of money that the different nations in the Palladium world use. There are several tomes presented with many different kinds of maps, from ley line charts to historical maps. The most interesting is *The Heroic Realms*, an account of six different worlds that heroes might be transported to. Finally, Coffin gives us a few other things to play with, like ancient elven air boats and big, nasty siege weapons.

Overall, **Library of Bletherad** book is more than worthwhile. About the only thing you could really criticize about it is Coffin's occasional wordiness as he goes very, very in-depth exploring the different elements of the book. But that's really nitpicking. Palladium Books has strayed from its usual formula of geographically-oriented sourcebooks, and this time with great success. A book of miscellany is a hard thing to do, and the theme of the mystic Library of Bletherad is the perfect tool for weaving all of this diverse material together into one coherent and interesting volume. GMs will find material here useful for just about any type of campaign, which makes this a recommended buy for anyone interested in this game.

-- Jon Thompson

by William H. Stoddard

Art by Alan Gutierrez

The 19th century is an ideal setting for science-fictional adventures: science and technology had achieved amazing things and could be expected to achieve even more, but enough remained unknown so that there were few limits to a writer's invention. Steampunk campaigns look back to that sense of possibility. *GURPS Steampunk* offers a catalog of Victorian marvelous inventions. Unfortunately, there wasn't space to fit in all the ingenious suggestions that came up during the playtest; in fact, several sections of the original text needed to be cut for space. Here then are some of these unexplored possibilities.

Further Looks at TL(5+1)

The age's main power source was coal-fired steam engines. But coal has serious inconveniences, especially in requiring stokers to move it from storage compartments to combustion chambers.

Phil Masters suggested that one solution to this problem, well within the range of Victorian technology, would be grinding coal into a fine powder that could be pumped like a liquid. Fluidized coal power plants require half as many tenders as standard steam engines (divide kW by 500, take the square root of the quotient, and round down). The coal still weighs 50 lbs. per cf, but costs 25% more, $0.10 per cf or $3.30 per ton. However, it cannot be stored in a bunker. Instead, it requires a fuel tank. A cubic foot of coal fills a 6.66-gallon tank, either standard or light (see p. VE89), and has a fire number of 9 in a standard tank or 10 in a light tank (see p. VE90). Under normal circumstances fluidized coal will simply burn, but like flour, it can form an explosive mixture with air in a confined space.

Another plausible variant fuel was noted by Jim MacLean: alcohol. Statistics for this are already provided on p. VE90. Either wood or grain alcohol weighs 5.8 lbs. per gallon, costs $0.025 per gallon, and has a fire number of 11 in a standard tank or 12 in a light tank. Reduce engine power to 85% of normal after conversion from fuel oil to alcohol.

Another playtester, M.A. Lloyd, noted that several 19th-century inventors attempted to develop a coal-gas fuel cell. Such a cell, including the gasification apparatus, might have the following performance statistics: weight 90 lbs. per kW if under 5 kW, or 225 lbs. + 45 lbs. per kW for higher power outputs; volume 1 cf per 50 lbs.; cost $5 per pound,

with a minimum of $50. Fuel consumption per kW would be 0.015 cf of coal and 0.125 gallons of water per hour. For example, an 8-kW fuel cell would weigh 585 lbs., take up 11.7 cf, cost $2,925, and use up 0.12 cf of coal (6 lbs.) and 1 gallon of water (8.5 lbs.) per hour.

The inventive Mr. Masters also suggested that a world with steam-powered mechanical computers might be able to build vehicles with TL(5+1) computerized controls. Such controls could allow one crewman to operate multiple vehicle systems from one station. The interface would be a mechanical analog of a computer terminal, weighing 200 lbs. and occupying 10 cf in addition to the space for the crew station. Cost for the system would be $1,000. Operating a vehicle with such a system would be at -1 to all skills per added function, owing to the complexity of the controls; in addition, anyone not previously experienced with such a control system would face unfamiliarity penalties.

(All statistics for these devices are my own treatments, based when possible on *GURPS Vehicles*. The proposers are not responsible for my versions of their ideas.)

Many steampunk campaigns are going to involve inventors and their novel devices. The operation of such devices will pose certain challenges. Operating a newly invented device requires gaining at least a new familiarity, often a new required specialization (for example, Shiphandling: Submersible), and sometimes a completely new skill (for example, Piloting). The invention of a new device is typically followed by a period of experimentation, when many devices are prototypes or home-built and there is little standardization. In effect, every new device requires a new familiarity. (See p. B43 for the relevant rules.)

If a device invented during play needs a new skill or required specialization, no teacher can be available. The use of the device must be self-taught, taking double the normal time (see p. B83). Once an adventurer has taught himself Pilot: Ethership or Shiphandling: Submersible, of course, he may be able to go into business as an instructor in the new skill.

Zeppelin

Among the vehicles that had to be cut from the published version of *GURPS Steampunk* was the L.3, a zeppelin built for the German navy. This airship has a crew of 15: two watches of pilot, bombardier, mechanic, and gas cell riggers, and a captain, navigator, and top gunner. Seats are available for half a dozen men who are off duty, but the L.3 is not really designed for long occupancy; on flights lasting more than a day the crew will become fatigued. Weekly costs of operation include $2,782.50 for hydrogen and $1,200 for fuel oil. The L.3 has an operational radius of up to 1,200 miles, sufficient to threaten warships, troop transports, or cities even in the British isles. Armaments are high explosive and incendiary bombs on a hardpoint on the undercarriage and a top-mounted 7.62-mm machine gun.

Subassemblies: Body +10, bottom Substructure +4.
Power & Propulsion: 3 x 156-kW high performance Diesel engine with aerial propeller.
Fuel: 2,000-gal., fuel oil (11), light, 95 hours.
Occupancy: See above
Cargo: none
Armor: Bo: 1/1, Su: 2/4
Weaponry: 5 x 110-lb. HE bomb [Su] +2. 20 x 6.5-lb. incendiary bomb [Su] +2. 7.62-mm machine gun (200 Solid)
Equipment: Su: Improved optical bombsight; Precision navigational instruments, +4.
Dim.: 490' x 20' x 20' Payload: 15,700 lbs. Lwt.: 52,700 lbs.
Volume: 796,000 cf. SizeMod: +10 Price: $33,750
HT: 12. HP: Bo: 8,963, Su: 80.
aSpeed: 25 mph. aAccel: 0.4 mph/s. aDecel: 0.5 mph/s. aMR: 0.125 mph/s. aSR: 4.
Lift: 53,700 lbs. Stall Speed 0. Climbing Speed 20 mph.

The L.3's high explosive and incendiary bombs have the statistics given in GURPS Vehicles. For a convenient summary, the high explosive bomb causes 6d x 160 concussion damage and 12d fragmentation damage; the incendiary bomb has a bursting radius of 40 yd. and inflicts fire damage of 3d on anyone caught by the burst. Both types of bomb fail only on a critical failure.

Other Skills

Many characters in Victorian fiction are able to talk to animals. This isn't a magical effect -- neither The Jungle Book nor The Story of Dr. Doolittle is fantasy as it's now understood -- or even a psionic one. In some fictional worlds animals have languages that a few human beings are able to learn. This commonly requires an Unusual Background. The relevant skills are as follows:

Language (Animal) (difficulty varies)   *No default*
Prerequisite: Mimicry (Animal Sounds or Bird Calls)

Animal languages are either Mental/Hard (for languages of land vertebrates) or Mental/Very Hard (for languages of more exotic species). Typically each species has a separate language, but this will depend on the setting; in some settings related species, or all animals, may share a language, while in others a single species may have different dialects or languages. This skill is only available with GM permission. Note that it does not apply to the language of a surviving tribe of primitive hominids, which would be treated as a Mental/Easy human language.

Linguistics (Animal) (Mental/Very Hard)   *No default*
Prerequisite: Language (Animal)

This skill is a required specialization of Linguistics. It confers the same benefits for animal languages that the usual form of Linguistics confers for human languages: +1/10 of skill added to any animal language you know. This skill is only available with GM permission.

This same treatment can work the other way, of course. For example, Dr. John Doolittle started out by teaching his African gray parrot, Polynesia, to understand English; she then returned the favor by teaching him animal languages. In *GURPS* terms the first step would involve the parrot's gaining Mimicry: Human Speech, followed by English as a Mental/Hard skill.

The Lost Princess

Due to space limitations, it was not possible to include example NPCs for all of the campaign worlds in *GURPS Steampunk*. Iron had John Bauer, Qabala had Rebekah Schwartzberg, and Providence had Father Carlos Javier, but none was provided for Etheria. Here is the missing character, specifically designed to get PCs in as much trouble as possible:

Pandhori Viron   **100 points**

Age 17; 5'5"; 130 lbs. A strikingly beautiful young woman with curly dark hair and pouting lips.

ST 8 [-15]; **DX** 11 [10]; **IQ** 12 [20]; **HT** 12 [20]
   Speed 5.75; Move 5.
   Dodge 5.

Advantages: Beautiful [15]; Charisma +1 [5]; Patron (Greek government, 9 or less) [25]; Status 7 [30]; Strong Will +1 [4];

Wealthy [20].
Disadvantages: Charitable [-15]; Curious [-5]; Overconfidence [-10];
Social Stigma (Woman) [-5]; Stubborn [-5].
Quirks: Admires Byron and Swinburne; Adventurous; Susceptible to
handsome or charming men; Tries to write poetry; Wishes to see the
Elgin Marbles returned to Greece. [-5]
Skills: Acting-11 [1]; Appreciate Beauty (The Male Figure)-8/13 [1];
Bard-12 [1]; Dancing-10 [1]; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-12 [1/2]; Holdout-11
[1]; Literature-10 [1]; Riding (Horse)-10 [1]; Savoir-Faire-14 [0]; Sex
Appeal-11 [1]; Stealth-10 [1].
Languages: English-11 [1]; French-10 [1/2]; Greek (Native)-12 [0].

Named for the mythical heroine Pandora, Lord Byron's granddaughter
inherited not only his physical beauty but his passionate, rebellious
spirit. She discovered his poetry at 13 and was inspired by it to learn English better than she might have otherwise; she
even dreams of writing poetry, though her work so far is amateurish, even in Greek. Her father wants to make a good
dynastic match for her and prays to avoid scandal until then; Princess Pandhori has other plans.

In a campaign based in the British isles, adventurers with an aristocratic background may meet Princess Pandhori at
court, as a guest of the Queen. Adventurers with other backgrounds may run across "Miss Dora Gordon," an educated
young lady with a curious foreign accent always accompanied by a man whose civilian clothing fails to conceal his
military bearing.

As a member of the Greek royal family, Princess Pandhori can act as a Patron for the adventure seed *The Lost City*.
She may even demand to join the expedition!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

We Don't Communicate Anymore. Over.

On election evening I was clicking "reload" on [CNN's website](#) every thirty seconds, trying to see if they had any new news. And I remembered how recent the advent of instantaneous communications are.

Ten years ago 24-hour cable news was the fastest widely available way to get news, with a general lag of half an hour. Twenty years ago network television was the fastest widely available way to get information, with a general lag of twelve hours or so (for important, but not critical, matters). Fifty years ago the radio was king. A hundred years ago it was the newspaper.

So a hundred years ago I would have needed to wait until the next morning for new information -- information that, if incomplete or incorrect, would need another day to update.

In 1492 the biggest news for most of Europe would probably have been the expulsion of the Moors from Spain; word of Columbus's "discovery" wouldn't have reached them until 1493.

Today, "instantaneous" communications themselves are hampered by the speed of light, over significant distances. The gulf between ol' Terra and Mars, for example, is significant enough that real-time vehicle operation isn't feasible; by the time you realize, "Holy crud! That rock has *fangs!* Turn right! Turn RIGHT!!!", the Martian landscape is already gnawing on your lander.

Anyway, the point of all this is: whether you realize it or not, the availability (or lack thereof) of communications will *significantly* affect your campaign. If folks can talk with others and receive near-instantaneous responses -- especially if those folks can help, like supervisors, police, newsgathering organizations, the Super Friends, etc. These kind of campaigns, left unchecked, can have PCs contacting the Big Guns whenever there's a problem they think they can't handle.

If you can contact these groups, but they aren't able to reply for a certain amount of time (be it hours/days/weeks), that will lead to another kind of campaign. These kind of communications tend to result in campaigns where the PCs report in to the Powers That Be, then go off on their own. This can take a fair amount of pressure off the PCs; it's a lot easier to try to go after the Death Valley Killer if you know that the FBI will be there in three hours. But this can also result in problems similar to instantaneous communications; if the PCs think they can just try to contain the killer, the pressure isn't on them to be decisive.

Finally, there's the possibility of no communications (or communications so sporadic as to be practically nonexistent). Here the PCs are truly on their own; any advice or updates will probably not get back to them until it's too late. The original *Star Trek* universe was like this; the PCs were expected to deal with each problem as they got to it, without knowing whether or not the higher-ups would approve. (It's also one of the problems I had with *Star Trek: The Next Generation*; they would report in for advice or guidance to some admiral or the like just often enough that I began to be bothered when they *didn't*. "Captain, we have devised a means of permanently destroying the Borg . . . are you *sure* Starfleet would want you to ignore this opportunity?" "Um . . . yep.")

GURPS Space has a good section on the implications of the availability of FTL communication, and the kind of decisions it affects on a campaign. But these concerns aren't limited to science fiction; almost *any* campaign will probably need to address the troubles of different types of communication. From modern day cell phones and e-mail to magical communication spells to long-range telepathy to homing pigeons to smoke signals to travelling the astral plane in the wink of an eye, the ability to send word quickly is common in many settings, and will affect the kind of adventures you can run. (Of course, it will also affect the game universe, but I tend to prefer to start thinking of a campaign from the adventurers up.)

Regardless of how limited or available you want communications to be, make sure you remind the players of this fact. In a world with instantaneous communications, not only should the PCs be calling their supervisors for backup and guidance, others should be calling the PCs, wanting them for backup, a news quote, or a project update. (There's

nothing worse than a ringing cell phone while sneaking into the bad guy's lair.)

If the PCs are in the habit of calling La Liga de los Héroes Estupendo Que Ponen Brillante la Ropa in Mexico City and waiting the two hours for them to show up, why not having neighboring cities a few hours away call them, asking for help or information.

And in a world with sketchy and inconsistent communications, you can remind them of this fact by having messages show up much too late. In a *Fading Suns* game I ran, where most non-vital messages are transported by spaceships, I had a letter arrive for a PC inviting her to her family's winter holiday . . . from the previous year. Receiving an addendum assignment for a city you just left, receiving Headquarters' missive delivered two weeks two late ("It says, 'It's vital not to hit the creature with energy weapons.' " "Yeah, we figured that out."), and finding messages that were meant for someone else but never made it (derelict space ships, an important folder in a remote mountain outpost, and half-formed spells of communication trapped in anti-magic areas like flies in amber) are all great ways to reinforce these ideas.

Of course, there's another aspect of communication I'll probably talk about in a couple of weeks: what are the PCs expected to *do*, that they may or may not be tempted to call someone else? But I'll tackle that one another day. In the interim, I need to click "reload" again and see if anything interesting has happened in the past fifteen minutes.

* * *

Well, things have been a bit disheveled for me this week, since on Saturday my sink broke where the water connection meets the wall, dumping about a half-inch of water into my apartment. (For you long-time Steven-watchers, yes, this *is* the same sink I had problems with [when I moved in here](). I am a sad l'il Pooka currently.) Fortunately, the damage wasn't anywhere near as bad as it could have been, since I'd listened to that little voice in my head and cleaned my apartment that day. So the same floor which was stacked with gaming books eight hours before was relatively clear when it happened. (Alas, I did lose a fair number of comics and a couple of *Aberrant* supplements. Apparently the water spirits are diametrically opposed to superheroes.)

Unfortunately, this is the second time in three years that a major plumbing problem has invaded my home . . . which is depressing, since 95% of my belongings are paper products. So let this serve as a lesson to you all (which my parents tried to instill on me . . . but failed): *Clean your home!*

Oh, and I currently don't have a sink again. <sigh>

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

*Last week's answer: **Orks at the Gate** board game, back of the box.*

(Five stars) "**Bench-thumping [Control]** -- Anyone who can get a television set to work by hitting it or persuade a gadget to work by thumping the laboratory bench in exasperation has the Bench-thumping ability."

Secret Histories Completed While You Wait

"The events of an interplanetary story -- aside from such tales as involve sheer poetic fantasy -- are best laid in the present, or represented as having occurred secretly or prehistorically in the past."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction"

[Last week,](#) I began an experiment in visibly Suppressing the Transmission, in building a conspiratorial secret history out here in the bright light of reader scrutiny. Our Worked Example takes as its theme the Lovecraft quote above, and having made some key decisions about our Secret Space Travel campaign -- the nature of the Secret, the Space, and the Travel -- we're ready to boldly go where ancient man has gone before.

"Oh man! Look at those cavemen go
It's the freakiest show
Take a look at the Lawman
Beating up the wrong guy
Oh man! Wonder if he'll ever know
It's in the best selling show
Is there life on Mars?"
-- David Bowie, "Life on Mars"

Any story (most emphatically including any roleplaying campaign) needs conflict, and in a story like this one, that means Bad Guys. If you're building a relatively short, or relatively focused, game, you can stick with just the one set. For a properly twisty, longer campaign, I like to use at least the Orwell-prescribed tripolar system. That way, any given set of Bad Guys has a plausible reason to help Our Heroes -- the other two Bad Guys are teaming up on it. For a real headscratching, "maze of intrigue" type game, use as many Bad Guys as you can realistically keep track of. Keep in mind that if you use more than about five factions, you're probably using more than your players can keep track of. So, given that the schtick is Secret Space Travel, whom among our Usual Unusual Suspects can we tap for this campaign frame?

- Well, we began with the Tibetans, back in umpty-thousand B.C. (In the Bayan Kara Shan mountain region of culturally-nearby Mongolia, there's roughly 10,000 year-old cave paintings showing, if you look at them right, the Dropa tribe's extraterrestrial origins.) The original descendants of the Ancient Astronauts could still be there, lurking up on the mountains as the Yeti (or, in the now horribly appropriate Tibetan, "mi-go"). Or, perhaps, their Timeless Wisdom survives in various isolated lamaseries or in the caverns of Agartha.
- The "eastern branch" filters through the traditional Shaolin monasteries, triads, and tongs of China, but it might make for an interesting variant if its current incarnation (or those studying it) are the Japanese [Black Ocean Society](#). In this version of the truth, the "Black Ocean" is, in fact, the "ocean of space," and the Japanese invasions and incursions into continental Asia may have been impelled by a need for orichalcum, ancient wisdom, surviving artifacts, and so forth.
- The "western branch" of the Ur-Tibetan (or Agarthan, or "Uighur" as Col. Churchward of Mu would put it) colonists, of course, built the Sphinx and Pyramids back when Egypt was a wettish grassland. After the Sirian bombardment, they scattered over the ancient Near East, building ziggurats and founding religions and crafting peculiar ancient technology. Their descendants passed the Secret Wisdom of Space Travel down from the Egyptians to the Hebrews (Arks and Temples and miracles, oh my!) and Pythagoras. The Hermetics of Alexandria concealed the Secret behind alchemy: changing lead into gold is a metaphor for training orichalcum-wielding space pilots. Initiatory Mithraism (and all the other quasi-Gnostic religions and traditions of "ascent through the spheres") contain fragments of this wisdom, too. Is there a surviving Middle Eastern tradition, perhaps on Mount Ararat, or in the region of [Irem](#)?
- The Templars, of course, learned the Secret during the Crusades, from Solomon's Temple, and while deep in the Egyptian and Moabite deserts. (Discovering a flying saucer emblazoned with a Templar Cross -- during an archaeological dig in the Golan Heights, or stored deep in the vaults of Chartres Cathedral -- will make a great "sense of secret wonder" moment.) Their descendants, the Illuminati, still carry on the research through their

pawns, the (check all that apply) British royal family, Nazi Party, American military-industrial complex, Communist Party, etc. The Secret can be re-discovered, or passed down continuously, or bitterly fought over by Illuminati sub-factions, at GM whim.

- For our fifth potential group, consider some outlier: the builders of Angkor Wat, or the Anasazi Indians, or a lost tribe deep in the South American jungle, or the descendants of 5th-century Irish travelers to New England (who learned it from Pythagoras' sojourn amongst the Druids). Whichever lucky culture your feel like cribbing out of Erich von Däniken (or W. Raymond Drake's vast panoplies in *Gods and Spacemen of the Ancient East* and *Gods and Spacemen of the Ancient West*) can be dragooned in here at need or will.

"[T]he mere fact of insisting on a secret history calls into question our whole construct of history as a rational object. In that sense, historical thinking becomes more postmodern and imaginative, perhaps hopelessly so -- we are forced to recognize that there are a multitude of stories or histories that provide context, and that each one gives us a fragmented perspective on what is going on."
-- Erik Davis, April 1997 interview

Which Secret Space Travelers you pick, and how many, will likely affect your theme. As noted above, the simpler and more straightforward the campaign, the fewer the Bad Guys. A space-operatic approach lends itself well to one Good But Feeble set of Secret Space Travelers (the remnants of the Victorian-era Lucretius Club, one lone lamasery on the slopes of Mt. Everest; a Navajo pueblo near Roswell retaining the Anasazi secrets) and one Powerful And Evil batch (the Japanese Mitsuru conglomerate descended from the Black Ocean, the CIA-Nazi-NASA combine that whacked Kennedy for uncovering the truth about UFOs, creepy Egyptian magicians made immortal and driven insane by overuse of orichalcum). A more *X-Files* influenced game might combine the Usual Suspects (the Chinese government, the U.S. government, the secret Soviet project now up for grabs) with a wild card (the Vatican, which got it from Leonardo's secret notebooks or from Italian Freemasons) or two (a mysterious billionaire who dug up a spaceship on his estate in New York) for extra confusion.

You can play it with a lighter tone, too. For a classic **GURPS Atomic Horror** game, the Nazis, Egyptians, and Tibetans work with the campy thriller mode; for a redirected martial-arts thriller ("Orichalcum Fists Of Heaven!"), it's all Eastern Wisdom and rival triads (plus the token treacherous Japanese or Westerners) fight over it in 1920s Shanghai. Moving the setting back and forth through history gives natural framing stories: in a WWII game, for example, our OSS/SOE heroes obviously have to uncover ancient Egyptian space travel secrets to defeat the Interplanetary Axis!

"The crucial and delicate matter of getting the characters off the earth must be very carefully managed. Indeed, it probably forms the greatest single problem of the story."
-- H.P. Lovecraft, "Some Notes on Interplanetary Fiction"

So, we've got a backstory, Good Guys (the PCs), NPC Bad Guys (and possibly Medium Guys), and a flavor or theme. So now what? I usually skip this part in conventional Suppressed Transmissions, but I'll dabble in it briefly now: the plot of a Secret History game (or any game of secrets and revelations, whether it's conspiratorial horror or magical quest) is a series of three-act layers of the Big Onion. First act, present the mystery. ("Why did Sir Charles leave me this corroded chunk of brass and his membership in a Florida fishing lodge?") Second act, present the revelation. ("You mean to tell me that a group of British millionaires built a UFO base in the Everglades in 1856?") Third act, resolve the conflict. ("Thanks to our Tibetan contacts, we were able to defeat the fiendish plot of the New Atlantis Society.") To extend the game, either encompass mini-games within it (hints lead to Tibet, PCs discover Tibetan spacecraft, they convince the lamasery to aid them), repeat the story again ("You'll think me mad, but I believe that villain Lord Arthur may have survived that collapsing pyramid shaft."), go sideways (players explore the role of the CIA in Tibet and the UFO phenomenon), or go deeper ("The New Atlantis Society was just a pawn in the greater games of Egyptian Freemasonry!") into the Onion.

"To ignore that level of activity, to deny its energies and events because they do not follow the rules, is to ignore so much of what was going on at the time and all the time. At the same time, the minute you have an idee fixe, you are sucked into a black hole and may never return. This is the tragedy of secret historians. To use a played-out metaphor, the trick is to constantly surf the edges of these various conspiratorial attractors while always staying on edge, and

remembering that there is always another story behind the story you think you are seeing. It becomes a simultaneously paranoid but anarchistic critical method of telling stories that situate us in different kinds of webworks of forces."
-- Erik Davis, April 1997 interview

[Bisociating](#) Secret Space Travel is easy. First, there's the open question of the first Ancient Astronauts: were they humans, human-appearing aliens, or alien geneticists? (Or, did alien geneticists build humans on Sirius, fight a war with them, create an "infiltration race" and then export the whole problem to Earth?) Are the ancient astronauts still Walking Among Us, immortal, or did they all die in the Pole Shift? In a "house of mirrors" style campaign, simply holding off on deciding which side is Good or Bad can give that bisociative frisson we crave, and makes an excellent twist if that third act seems too predictable. Is orichalcum-control pseudoscience or technomagic? Discovering more examples of either could answer the question, or simply cloud the issue. To [nova](#) the campaign, simply reverse a key assumption. If the Nazi Mars colony nukes Tel Aviv (or Miami), or if the Sirians return, it's not a Secret anymore, and the game takes on a new dimension as all the groups the PCs never found out about get flushed into the open. If dinosaurs actually roam the jungles of Venus, it's not Space, even (or especially) if Mars stays its old dead self. The PCs now have to figure out who built Venus, and why, and who covered it up, and why. And if the flying saucers are actually astral-projection chambers (or magical pentacles) after all, it's not Travel. Which should bring up the question: who went to all this trouble to convince us it was? And what exactly are They hiding on Mars?

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

?

by Richard Flanagan

Art colored by Keith Johnson

And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another?
-- Luke 7:19

It is a weapon cast in fear and forged in nightmare.

The very few who have heard of its existence do not speak openly of it. If the rumors are true and this blade exists then it not only casts the darkest illumination on the beliefs of both Heaven and Hell, but it also means that a monstrous force of malice stalks the faithful on Earth in its two thousand year old quest for vengeance.

It is the Sword of the Baptizer.

The Facts

The first known record of the Sword of the Baptizer comes from 317 AD, from a scribe of Constantine the Great. After issuing the Edict of Milan four years earlier, which was the foundation of the Roman Empire's embrace of Christianity, Constantine began to amass a collection of every holy relic which could be found. Among those assembled were apparently the Spear of Destiny (the lance which pierced Christ's side), the cloth which would come to be known as the Shroud of Turin, twelve of the thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas for his betrayal of Christ at Gethsemane, and a sword which was believed to have once belonged to John the Baptist. Constantine took the sword as his own, during which time his was described as "quite unlike himself, in virtue and demeanor," and within a fortnight his behavior was "diabolical." The sword was taken from him and he soon returned to normal.

After being taken from Constantine, the whereabouts of the sword were unknown until the early Thirteenth Century. When the Knights Templar raided Constantinople in 1204, a number of relics were taken, among them the Sword of the Baptizer. The sword came into the possession of a Crusader named Iason of Yorkshire, later known as Iason the Black and the Devil Knight of Yorkshire. Iason left the Crusades and returned to England. Once there tales of his being in league with the Devil grew quickly. He was accused of heresy, murder, and other "behaviours most blasphemous," at which point he fled England and returned to the European continent. He was last seen near the Black Forest in Germany. The Sword of the Baptizer was still in his possession.

Centuries passed with no mention of the Sword. Towards the end of the Nineteenth century the Sword began appearing in reports from various sources in Eastern Europe. It was passed from owner to owner until finally falling into the clutches of the Third Reich. Once the war was over the Sword again disappeared, although it is believed to have been brought to the United States.

The Sword

A great deal of the mystery surrounding the Sword of the Baptizer is due to that fact that very few descriptions of the weapon describe it in the same way. Various reports have stated that it is a longsword, a gladius, a broadsword, or a kopesh. This fact splits those who have heard of the sword into two differing schools of opinion; one that the sword can manifest itself into whatever form the owner finds most pleasing, and the other that the sword is merely a rumor, and these inconsistencies are the proof. The tales do agree of a few details, however. First, the metal of the blade has taken on a rusty hue, although no sign of wear can be found. In fact, all the tales agree that the metal of the blade is unmarred, and furthermore than no amount of abuse can even scratch it. Finally, the hilt of the blade is wrapped in a deeply tanned leather which is said to be the skin of John the Baptist.

The Rumors

Central to every tale concerning the Sword is its relationship to John the Baptist. However, that the sword was merely one of his possessions does not seem to explain the malevolent behavior associated with those whom claim the sword as theirs. There are some scholars and mystics who have presented a second, much darker explanation for the sword's origin.

Shortly before his death, as told in the Gospel of Luke, John sent two messengers to ask Jesus if he was, in fact, the Messiah, or if there was one yet to come who would assume that role. According to some, this inquiry shows a direct lack of John's faith in Jesus as Christ. It was a lack of faith which followed John through his imprisonment by Herod and his eventual beheading. It is supposed that John's faithlessness turned to rage at being put to death while a false messiah wandered free. At the moment of his beheading, his shade was neither raised to Heaven nor cast into Perdition, but was anchored directly to the weapon which ended his life. Now, those who own the sword are possessed

by the enraged spirit of John the Baptist, who even in death wages war on the faithful of a callused god who let him perish.

The Curse

While the exact cause of the dementia which grips the owner of the Sword can only be speculated, certain facets of their condition remain consistent. The possessor's nature becomes very grave and surly almost immediately. He will keep the Sword by him, as close as possible at all times, going through great length if need be to do so. An absolute rejection of all religious beliefs will become readily apparent. He will tend to speak in other languages intermittently, chiefly Latin, ancient Greek and ancient Hebrew. The owner's palms will eventually become darkened and callused, and a faint scent of cooked meat will hang in the air about him. Most notably, however, will be changes in the owners dietary habits; he will dine solely on honey and locusts.

The victims of the Sword have also traditionally had many traits in common. Firstly, and most importantly, they are always devout in their religious beliefs, and all follow one of the Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam). Every known victim of the Sword has been found beheaded, although there is never a loss of blood from the body. This is because the wound inflicted by the weapon cauterizes immediately due to incredible heat.

The Mechanics

The statistics for the Sword of the Baptizer are presented for use with *In Nomine*. What is provided are only suggested abilities, also they are left purposely incomplete so that the Game Master may flesh them out as best suits his whims.

The Sword of the Baptizer

Power +6   Accuracy +3   Reliquary/6

When used against someone of deep religious conviction (as noted above) or exceptional faith (including angels, Soldiers and Saints), the sword will glow white hot. This heat causes an additional +4 to damage (for a total Power of +10). Any wound inflicted by the Sword while in this state will burn closed instantly, leaving a deep and permanent scar.

The Spirit of the Sword

Corporeal -- 4 Strength 10   Agility 7
Ethereal -- 5 Intelligence 10 Precision 10
Celestial -- 5 Will 11   Perception 10

Skills: Dodge/4, Fighting/5, Large Weapon (Sword (any type))/6, Small Weapon (Short sword)/6
Songs: Form (Ethereal/6), Motion (Corporeal/5), Possession/6, Tongues (Corporeal/3)

The Spirit is a Ghost as described in the *Corporeal Player's Guide* (p. 82). The Spirit itself is attuned to the Sword; it uses the Song of Possession to control the owner of the Sword.

The Hooks

There are a number of ways to incorporate the Sword of the Baptizer into a game. These include:

- One of the more militant Archangels (in particular Dominic or Laurence, because of their affinity for Christianity) see the existence of the Sword to be disturbing and potentially dangerous to many widely held beliefs. Their Servitors are assigned to find the Sword (or discover if it indeed exists), and destroy it with

extreme prejudice.

- Many Princes view the potentiality of a weapon with such strong ties to the core of Christian belief problematic. While the sword itself might be a tool for Evil, the foundation of every myth concerning the Sword harkens back to the tales of John the Baptist, and on a larger scale Jesus and the entirety of Christianity, which the propaganda machines of The Game have long sought to crush in Hell. Despite its dark nature, if it exists the Sword needs to be eliminated.
- On the other hand, certain Princes, such as Malphas, would simply adore to obtain the Sword for his own dire purposes . . .
- A series of murders all begin to point to a serial killer targeting openly religious figures in town (noted preachers, reverends, or maybe just older women known to do charity work for the Church). Of course, the victims are always found beheaded, their wounds neatly seared shut. A little investigation reveals a local antiques collector recently acquired a sword dating back to Biblical times.

While the Sword works well as a foil for the characters, it should never be allowed to stay in a character's possession. Besides being extremely powerful and guaranteed to upset game balance, the owner of the weapon would soon succumb to the Spirit and eventually need to be relinquished to the Game Master as an NPC.

Of all the categories of syker powers in Pinnacle's ***Hell on Earth***, Pyrokinesis is the one that has the least creative selection of powers. While other categories allow you to boost natural body functions, rip a man's heart out, or control his mind those specializing in Pyrokinesis are limited to starting fires, blowing things up, and not being hurt by fire. According to page nine of the syker sourcebook ***Brainburners***, Pyrokinesis covers "the mental manipulation and creation of fire, flame, and heat," and the following five powers show you what a creative pyrokinetic can do under those guidelines. It goes without saying that all of the powers listed here fall under the category of Pyrokinesis.

Firebomb

TN: See Chart
Strain: See Chart
Speed: 3
Duration: up to 5 minutes/Blastin' level
Range: Touch

Firebomb was created by sykers to create diversions while on missions. By touching an inanimate object and concentrating a syker can add energy to the object, exciting its molecules and eventually causing the object to catch fire. Unlike similar powers such as Arson, the object does not immediately explode, instead catching fire at a point in time decided upon by the syker, up to five minutes in the future per level of Blastin' the syker possesses; so a character with four levels in Blastin' could cause an object to burst into flames up to twenty minutes after he invoked this power. The TN is based on how flammable the item normally is, with the following chart giving some examples.

Item	TN
3	gasoline, napalm
5	wood, paper
7	damp wood
9	bullets, explosives
11	titanium

Heat Distortion

TN: 7
Strain: 1
Speed: 2
Duration: Concentration or 1/round
Range: 5 yards/Blastin' level

Anybody who's spent any amount of time in a desert has seen heat distortion, the blurring of vision caused by heat radiating off the ground between yourself and the object you are looking at. Sykers have figured out how to create this effect on demand. Heat Distortion allows a syker to create a wall of superheated air anywhere in range, affecting an area 2' x 1" x 6' per level in Blastin'. Anyone looking through the superheated air has their vision blurred, resulting in all ranged attacks through the affected area having a -2 penalty to the appropriate Trait or Attribute roll, with an additional -2 for each raise the syker gets. Those foolish enough to run through the area of superheated air suffer 1d4 Wind +1d4 for every raise the syker had.

Heatstroke

TN: Opposed (Spirit)
Strain: 1
Speed: 1
Duration: Instant
Range: 10 yards/Blastin' level

Pyrokinetic sykers have a bit of a problem when it comes to the subtlety department, as use of Arson, Detonate, or Pyro tends to draw the attention of others. They needed a power that would allow them to quickly take out an opponent without attracting attention or destroying their surroundings. What they came up with was Heatstroke.

Heatstroke allows a syker to generate an extreme amount of heat in a person's body, sending them into shock. If the syker succeeds in his opposed Blastin' roll, his victim suffers 1d6 Wind, +1d6 Wind for every raise.

Hot Zone

TN: 5
Strain: 1
Speed: 1
Duration: Instant
Range: 5 yard radius/ Blastin' Level

Hot Zone was developed by Earth sykers during the Last War who were tired of soldiers and robots using infrared sensors to hunt them down, especially since robots were immune to the syker power Blindside. Hot Zone instantly raises the temperature of the air around the syker to nearly unbearable levels for one second (inflicting 1d4 Wind on all in the area of effect, including the syker), with anyone looking at the area of effect with infrared sensors seeing a flash of light as bright as if a lit magnesium flare was shoved into their face. In game terms this results in a -6 penalty to all rolls done by those using infrared, with an additional -4 to all ranged attacks they make. This lasts for ten minutes, -2 minutes for each success and raise the victim makes on a Hard (9) Vigor roll.

Too Hot to Handle

TN: 5
Strain: 1
Speed: 2
Duration: 1/round
Range: Self

Too Hot to Handle is a pyrokinetic's equalizer when it comes to hand-to-hand combat, allowing a syker to excite the molecules of his body so they heat to the point that anyone touching (or is touched by) the syker is burned. With a successful Blastin' roll a syker using Too Hot to Handle does +2 damage on each successful Fightin: brawlin', wrasslin', or other unarmed form of attack, with an additional +2 damage for each raise on his Blastin' roll. Anyone attacking the syker with a fist, kick or (in the case of abomination) claw takes 1d4 damage from the heat, +1d4 for each raise the syker got on his Blastin' roll. Creatures unaffected by fire and/or heat take no damage from Too Hot to

Handle.

Note that while a syker takes no damage from using his power occasionally his clothing and equipment ends up a bit singed. If a syker goes bust on his Blastin' roll while invoking Too Hot to Handle he sets an item he is carrying on fire. Hope he didn't have any spook juice on him . . .

Pyramid Review

Panzer Grenadier

Published by [Avalanche Press](#)

Wargame boxed set with 495 2/3 inch Counters, four 11x17 inch hard mounted polymorphic maps, Rules Booklet; $59.95

Panzer Grenadier is a platoon level combat game set on the Eastern Front during the Second World War. The box includes 4 geomporphic mounted gameboards (200 meters a hex), 330 playing pieces (2/3 inch), 165 markers, a 16 page rulebook, a 64 page scenario book (51 scenarios), 4 cardstock charts, and an errata insert. The game is designed to be simple, without being simplistic.

West End Games released a series of *Tank Leader* games in the eighties, which were also platoon level simulations set on the Eastern, Western, and the deserts of Africa respectively. This game used an innovative card mechanic for activation of various units, which really served to show how the Germans were able to win versus superior forces, using superior equipment. The Germans had an essential flexibility which the Soviets lacked. *Panzer Grenadier* is also able to showcase this superior flexibility of the Germans, versus the material superiority of the Soviets. *Panzer Grenadier* uses leaders to determine the activation and movement of its units. The Soviets have much fewer leaders than the Germans; therefore they tend to bunch up, and they lack an essential flexibility. When they are able to concentrate their force they can be devastating, but if they are disrupted, then there is hell to be paid.

Squad Leader was one of the first games to really focus upon the morale of units in combat situations. It wasn't necessary for units to be physically destroyed if you could break their morale. *Panzer Grenadier* also uses morale as a factor in combat. This, too, increases the value of leaders, since they give bonuses to units attempting to rally. This can give the game a curious ebb and flow as units are demoralized, and attempt to rally -- does the opponent fire at these units again seeking to eliminate them, or focus attention elsewhere? The sheer breadth of decision-making is enormous within this game, and each decision can have consequences down the road.

This game shares a heritage from other games that have come before, but is there anything especially innovative about this game? Well, *Panzer Grenadier* isn't merely content to steal from the best and brightest, but has a few tricks up its own sleeve. Most notable is how initiative is determined each turn. Each player rolls two dice, with the result being modified by an initiative factor given in the individual scenario . . . the higher result wins initiative. The lower result is then subtracted from the higher result, divided by two, and this is the number of extra action phases the winning player receives before the other player can receive an action phase. The players then take turns going back and forth with their action phase until both pass, then a new turn starts. In each action phase a leader, or a stack of units, may activate units in the same or adjacent hexes may move or fire. These units are then finished acting for the turn. You could launch a huge assault, only to have the other player chip away at it piecemeal, phase by phase, later in the turn. Keeping an operational reserve is a necessity with this game. Just one simple activation mechanic results in Russians bunching up, and being more vulnerable to artillery fire. It also results in German units being able to surprise and disrupt Russian moves more often.

This game strips away a lot of the plaque that has built up around platoon level combat. This is a game where you can have a huge mass of counters, and still have some shot at finishing the scenario. Smaller engagements tend to be a bit more brutal, while there is a magnificent ebb and flow in larger encounters. As a player your objective might have been to secure a town at the start of the scenario, but you may have to take units away from the town to secure your flank, or you might lose initiative and simply have to fight for survival for a turn, while leaving larger objectives alone.

I would have liked having maps that were a bit more interesting. They might be accurate historically, and geographically, for the Eastern Front, but they are boring. There is also a FAQ on the Avalanche Games website,

which helps with some of the questions that arise within the rules. This is not to say that they are badly written, but this game puts things together slightly differently than other games that have gone before, and it takes some time to see how it all works together.

Overall this game gives you a lot of bang for the buck. It hides its complexity well, which makes it easy to teach. New players are not frustrated by the system, but enamored of the possibilities that the battlefield presents. The large number of counters, maps, and rules for design you own scenarios give this game an extended playability that is welcome. In all, ***Panzer Grenadier*** is well worth the money I spent on it.

-- Scott Shafer

Pyramid Pick

Sketch! RPG

Published by [Corsair Publishing](#)

Written by Seth Johnson and Brian Schomburg

48 pages; $6.95

Sketch! is a breath of fresh air in the superhero roleplaying game market. Unlike most superhero roleplaying games, which attempt to quantify each aspect of a character's powers, *Sketch!* has a lightweight system which aids in the authors' stated goal of bringing new players into the adventure games hobby.

The world of *Sketch!* bears little resemblance to our own: a cartoonish world in the center "of all explored space," the planet Sketch is a tourist mecca and headquarters for over ninety percent of the universe's media and business conglomerates. In other words, it's a perfect place for a hero (or villain) looking for fame to test their meddle.

Sketch! has a unique character creation system -- players generate characters by drawing them. There are no real restrictions on genre, equipment, or, luckily, drawing ability. (Some of the character art is attributed to "Dan Zigmund and Sherri Johnson's Second Grade Class, South Grove Elementary.") For those who fiercely believe they can't be trusted to draw, *Sketch!* provides an appendix of modular comic book art clips that can be cut and pasted on to a stick figure.

Once you've drawn your character and given it a name, players pass the characters around the table, where everyone votes on your character's statistics on a scale of 1 to 10: Speed, Muscle, Power, Gear, Mind, and Toughness. Take the average of your votes, and you've got a complete character for *Sketch!* (A slightly expanded character creation system later in the game allows for non-combat Skills, Money, and special privileges called Perks.)

The second chapter of *Sketch!* (right after character creation) is a simple game, designed for people who have not played a roleplaying game before, or are just picking up *Sketch!* and want a rude throw-down. The basic game starts in media res with a battle between heroes and villains. (The game provides for players to play both sides, or the GM can take the role of one side.) Combat ensues, with the following basics.

All rolls in *Sketch!* are done on six-sided dice. Characters begin combat by rolling for initiative (modified by Speed). In order, they take movement and actions. All non-combat actions are tested by a roll of 2d6 + the appropriate attribute versus a difficulty number, with the average being 12. In the case of an attack, the attacker rolls 2d6 + an appropriate attribute and the defender does the same. This allows for a range of options. For example, Timmy Lightning might use his Gear attribute to use his Lightning Blasto!, while Mental Mary uses Mind to throw up her Brain Bricks. If the attacker succeeds, the defender takes the difference between the two rolls in damage to her Toughness. A character with 0 or below Toughness drops unconscious for 1d6 rounds, at which point they wake up with only 1 point of Toughness.

This simple combat system allows for comic-book style combat, with low lethality, but lots of over-the-top action. All combats are followed with a press conference, an opportunity for Costumes (as both heroes and villains are called in *Sketch!*) to ham it up, and boost their Popularity Points, the main source of advancement in *Sketch!* The more Popularity Points a Costume earns, the more they can get away with changing their media identify (increasing their

attributes). A unique addition to this system -- as opposed to experience points -- is the ability to lose popularity in a hurry, forcing the character to return "back-to-basics" and lose those changes (bonuses) in a hurry.

The third chapter of *Sketch!* details the Expanded Game, a more traditional roleplaying game that moves past Saturday night brawls to an entire *Sketch!* campaign. This includes the advanced character creation; the only addition is that character can now buy non-combat skills, extra money, and special perks. These skills aren't rated, but give the character bonus dice to roll when performing a feat relevant to the skill. Perks give the character standard (and not-so-standard) superhero bonuses: media agents, a base of operations, connections, independent wealth, and insurance (for those nasty property damage bills that are bound to come in when slugging it out in the streets). The expanded game gives a few notes on gamemastering and how to run a campaign -- nothing the average gamer won't know, but useful information for the neophyte. The chapter is concluded with a lightweight story-based experience system for purchasing more and new skills and perks, and a small bit on character death (it's rare, and completely voluntary).

As a final chapter, *Sketch!* concludes with a travel guide to the planet Sketch, which consists mainly of "create anything you possibly want to," with a short bit about the largest city, Sketchopolis. The chapter concludes with the "Sketch Adventure Generator," a set of random tables full of words to plug into a sentence, much like "Mad Libs." It's actually pretty entertaining, and provides amusing, if not altogether good, ideas for adventures.

On the whole, does *Sketch!* meet its goal of being an introductory roleplaying game for beginners? Certainly; the game is definitely not too complex to be a beginning roleplaying game for someone, and the comic book format it is presented in is inviting enough not to frighten away parents, or carry too much of a "roleplaying stigma." (I actually couldn't find the word "roleplaying" anywhere within the book: it used "storytelling" and "adventure game" instead.) Would I recommend it to experienced players? Definitely; at the least, it's a fun diversionary beer-and-pretzels game, and at the most, it can provide for an interesting campaign for a not-so-serious group of players. My only complaint is that after playing *Sketch!*, beginning players may be turned off by the amount of restrictions and point-counting in more mainstream roleplaying games.

-- Clinton R. Nixon

Pyramid Review

Galaxy: The Dark Ages

Published by GMT Games

Created by Don Greenwood and Reiner Knizia

Boxed card game with 120 cards, 25 chips, four combat dice, and a plastic draw/discard tray; $25.00

Galaxy: The Dark Ages from GMT Games is a strategy card game for two to five players that plays in just over an hour. A descendant of *Titan: The Arena*, *Galaxy* depicts a power struggle between the players for influence among the eight worlds. Designed by Reiner Knizia (*Tigris & Euphrates*, *Modern Art*) and developed by Don Greenwood (*Up Front*, *Squad Leader*), *Galaxy* shows both European and Avalon Hill influences and makes an excellent game for hobby gamers and regular folk alike.

The game starts with the eight world cards in a row, heading eight columns. Players do not play individual worlds; they are behind the scenes manipulators -- galactic illuminati, if you will. Players have five bases which they place during the game onto one world or another, representing influence in the different worlds. You can place one base per turn, and bases played earlier in the game give more influence than those placed later. Of course, since one world is eliminated in each of the five rounds, bases placed early in the game may disappear with their world. Bases can be "improved" or "damaged" (moving them up and down the columns and increasing or decreasing their influence and score) during play.

Each player begins with eight cards, nearly all representing ships with strengths of zero through ten belonging to the eight worlds. Each turn you place a ship in the column of its parent planet. When all columns have a ship in the current row the planet defended by the lowest strength defender is removed.

Players may place one secret base, in the first round, which sits on a face down card played in front of them. They get no influence from it during the game, but neither can it be attacked. At the end of the game it scores as the highest level of influence, if its world survives. Players can reveal it during a later turn in place of placing a base, in which case it's placed at the highest influence level.

The weaker ships, strengths 0-5, all have special effects when placed: allowing you to improve one of your bases or damage someone else's, pick up an extra card, see some of another player's hand, or put someone else's cards in their reserve. Each of the eight worlds also has a special power that can be used by the world's governor when they place a card in that column. The governor, of course, is the person with the most visible influence in that world. There are also technology cards, which give you an extra power, such as revealing secret bases, an advantage in combat, or allowing an extra card draw. Technological advantages are fleeting, however: they disappear at the end of the round.

Play takes from an hour to an hour and a half. A couple games' worth of experience speeds things up. When faced with several problems and no good plays, the novice tends to stare at his cards, looking for an answer; but experience quickly teaches you to play a delaying move if you have one, and draw, hoping the next turn will give you better options.

The artwork is spectacular. Each class of ship, each alien race, each technology card is rendered in full color at a very high resolution. You will catch your opponents simply staring at the cards. GMT rules are usually very easy to learn from, but a few sections will have loose wording that can cause interpretation problems during the game. *Galaxy* is the opposite: the rules are very precisely worded, with procedures and options unambiguously laid out, but they are difficult to pick up on the first read through. An index or table of contents would have been a big help. It's fairly easy when explaining the game to new players to forget Spoils of War or some other important detail. Luckily, the somewhat involved turn sequence is spelled out on the back cover.

Play has several intriguing facets: as worlds disappear, the rounds move more quickly. Play is fairly constrained; your eight cards may give you only six plays, half of which are to your disadvantage. You must make the most of what you have. Player interaction is very strong; it's easy to hurt other players, and you often find yourself cooperating with another player to defend a world valuable to both of you, yet trying to smite each other on other worlds.

At ninety minutes, play is relatively short for a strategy game, and it's good and tense throughout. Barring exceptional bad luck, all players should be in the running until the last round. Since secret bases on a surviving world are worth five points, and those on an eliminated world are worth nothing, the final score may surprise everyone. One drawback to play is that as the worlds disappear, more and more cards are unplayable, until in the final round only 44% of the cards can be played. Thus just when the game gets dramatic, players have to discard and draw, each in turn, hoping to be the first to draw a playable card. If you were clever enough to save playable cards for this you can control the endgame; otherwise it can feel anticlimactic. But in all *Galaxy* a solid game.

A few tips: the governor of the Cylor has a large advantage in card flow in the endgame -- either make yourself the governor of the Cylor or shut that world down early. The Myrmidons can force you to use your draw to pick up your reserve; don't make the governor of that world mad at you. The most powerful use of the Divergence power of playing two ships in a turn is probably ending a round early by filling the last two empty places. Saving your bases for play later in the game to improve their chances of surviving to the end may seem attractive, but you end up with bases worth one or two points instead of three or four, so get your bases down early and fight for them!

-- C. Andrew Walters

by Stephen Dedman

Art by **ArtToday**

For this adventure, the GM will need the *GURPS Basic Set*, *GURPS Compendium I* and *II*, and *GURPS Old West 2nd Edition*; *GURPS Voodoo* and *GURPS Undead* may also be useful. The adventure is designed for 100-point Old West characters, but can easily be adapted for a cinematic campaign or for *GURPS Deadlands*.

The adventure is set in the 1870s, when there was a thriving black market in nitroglycerine, and can be part of an episodic or picaresque campaign. PCs may be any combination of character types that can reasonably travel and work together and are motivated by a desire for wealth and/or excitement. It is designed for a campaign where ritual magic works; GMs who prefer a realistic no-magic campaign may ignore the effects of magic or explain them away with natural causes, and a choice of supernatural or realistic endings is provided.

Fair Game

The adventure begins when the PCs encounter a small band of proud but non-hostile Comanches with food and hides to trade. The PCs may be townspeople, cowboys on a drive, hunters, 'rust-eaters,' explorers, settlers en route to farmland or prospectors headed for a boomtown, even soldiers at a fort . . . the important thing is that they should have something the Comanches want, and be hungry for fresh food and/or the money that can be made from furs.

Only one of the Comanches, Bigger Bear, speaks any English, and if none of the PCs speak Comanche, Bigger Bear will act as interpreter. After a little haggling over prices, Bigger Bear will suggest gambling for some items instead.

The competitions proposed by the Comanches are:

1. *A foot race*, for up to four competitors from each side. After some haggling, a distance of 400 yards is agreed upon. (Broken Lance, the fastest runner in the Comanches, has a running speed of 8.25 without a sprint bonus.) The start of the race is a Contest of Running skill (+2 for characters with Combat Reflexes); each point by which the winner wins gives him a 6" lead.
2. *Rifle-shooting*. The target is a piece of paper the size of a playing card, at 100 yards (-17 to hit). Each competitor is permitted one shot after bets are placed; those who hit it can compete in the next round, when the target is moved to 200 yards away (-19), and so on, as the target is moved back 100 yards each time until only one competitor remains.
3. *Horse-racing*. This is as much a test of nerve and skill as of speed. The racers (two at a time) hurtle towards a horizontal bar 100 yards away, high enough for the horse to pass underneath it, but low enough to knock a rider

from his seat. The winner is the first to touch the bar. Competitors must first roll on Will not to stop too soon, then a contest of Riding skill to see who stops nearest the bar; a competitor who fails to make his Riding roll by 3 or more will crash into the bar and be knocked from his mount, taking 2d-8 cr. damage. The Comanches will ride their ponies bareback and naked, to reduce their encumbrance, and will try to persuade the whites to do the same. The Comanches' best rider, Bitten by Cats, has a pony with Move-14. The start of the race is a Contest of Riding skill (+2 for characters with Combat Reflexes); each point by which the winner wins gives him a 1' lead.

4. *Archery*. More a competition of Fast-Draw (Arrow) than of accuracy; archers must fire as many arrows into the air as they can before the first one lands. Each competitor has ST turns to shoot with a short bow; if the first shot 'missed', subtract 1 turn for every point by which they missed. (The Comanches will not be expecting whites to compete at this, but will bet heavily on their own archers if any PC comes forth.)

The PCs are free to suggest other forms of competition, such as contests of ST, knife or tomahawk throwing, or even card games such as poker or monte (games which the Indians took to with enthusiasm, even making their own cards and learning how to cheat. Indians rarely cheated when playing against their own tribesmen -- but whites and unfriendly tribes were fair game.)

Let the contests and gambling continue as long as the players are interested, then . . .

Is this a dagger I see before me?

While the games are happening, one of the PCs or an NPC on their side will notice the Arkansas toothpick tucked into Broken Lance's breechclout. Carved into the hilt is the inscription 'Mark VIII 24.' A moment later, the character will remember why this is familiar; one of the most vicious killers to ever come west from New Orleans, Lucien Xavier Dimascio, had the trademark of inscribing Biblical quotations onto his weapons and some of his victims. (Identifying Biblical quotations requires either a Bible and the Literacy advantage, or a critical success on Theology. Bible quotations are given at the end of the adventure.)

If Broken Lance can be persuaded to tell where he got the knife, he will say that the knife's owner had killed and scalped a Comanche woman while she'd been gathering food and firewood. The woman's daughter had escaped, and the warriors hunted the man down; Broken Lance had killed and scalped him, then kept his weapons. He'd also taken two books the man had been carrying, and used them for making a shield.

A successful roll against Criminology or Literature (Dime Novels) will enable the PCs to remember more of Dimascio's story.

Roll succeeds by 0-4:	Dimascio came west from New Orleans about ten years ago, and is thought to be guilty of at least twelve murders, all done with knives or axes and adorned with his trademark Biblical quotation, plus an unknown number of scalpings of anyone dark-haired and dark-skinned enough to pass as Apache, and a few shootings in self-defense.
Roll succeeds by 5-9:	Dimascio was a former altar boy and a gifted student of music, languages and theology, whose taste for gambling and women led him to New Orleans's vice districts. After he was accused of murdering two gamblers -- one with a knife, the other with an axe -- he hid for a while, then headed west about ten years ago. There were many sightings of him in that time -- working as a logger, a carpenter, a trapper, a buffalo skinner, a butcher, a saddler and bootmaker, a prospector, a gambler and pianist on riverboats and in saloons, a school-teacher, an actor, even an itinerant preacher. He usually worked alone, because even the West's worst badmen were nervous around him, but is suspected of having masterminded some elaborate confidence tricks and robberies, although none of his loot has ever turned up. It's rumored that Dimascio was the first to give the Apache the idea of making playing cards out of white men's hides. The

price on his head is $1,000, dead or alive.

Dimascio's last victim, a con man suspected of stealing a jewel worth thousands, was found two years ago, an unfired derringer in his hand, knife-wounds to his face, and a note pinned to his embroidered vest.

Critical success:	The con man was named 'Doc' George Fletcher, and he was found dead in a town called Rosary. He and Dimascio were suspected of stealing a star sapphire worth $3000, but the stone was never found. If asked, Broken Lance will say, truthfully, that no jewels were found on Dimascio's body, which was stripped then left for the buzzards to eat.

If it doesn't occur to the PCs that the papers in Broken Lance's shield might reveal the secret of Dimascio's hidden loot, an NPC who overhears the story should be inspired to suggest this -- preferably one too lazy, honest or disabled to undertake such a quest himself.

With Your Shield, or On It

The games with the Comanches should finish without bloodshed, unless a PC is caught cheating or accuses one of the Comanches. If the PCs want the knife, Broken Lance considers it worth a good rifle, but any attempts to persuade him to part with his shield will be unsuccessful. The shield, he says, is enchanted, and anyway, he doesn't have it with him. If Broken Lance has a good or better reaction to a PC, he may (if asked the appropriate question) reveal that the shield has to be kept half a mile from camp for fear that menstruating women will contaminate it, but neither he nor his fellow braves will say any more.

If the PCs decide to search the area around the Comanches' camp for the shield, they will need to do so by stealth. The search, though difficult, should be successful . . . but almost as soon as they've taken the shield, Bigger Bear and Bitten by Cats ride past. If the PCs can't hide from them, or fast-talk their way out of the situation, they'll need to fight -- preferably without gunshots alerting the camp.

If the PCs decide against looking for Broken Lance's shield, then they will have a chance to take it a few days later, when cholera breaks out in the Comanches' camp. The band's medicine man convinces them that the whites have cursed them, and the braves attack the PCs' camp (fort, town, wagon train, Hell on Wheels, etc.) in retaliation. Broken Lance will be killed in the raid, and his damaged shield will be discovered by a PC. Other details of the attack and its aftermath, and the course of the epidemic, are left up to the GM.

Books of Blood

The pages used to stuff Broken Lance's shield come from two sources -- a Catholic Bible, and a diary, both written in Latin. If none of the PCs can read Latin, they should be able to find a translator with a visit to any established town, army fort, or wagon train, and a good or better Reaction Roll (most Catholic priests, lawyers, biologists and doctors will have at least half a point in the language, as would most men taught in an English public school).

The Bible should be easy to identify as such; the incomplete diary is essentially a written confession. If the PCs read the fragments (in the original or translation), they'll learn all of Dimascio's story, above, plus a few details no-one else knows.

Dimascio claims to have killed Fletcher in self-defense, throwing his knife as the con man reached for his pistol. He then gloats about hitting him in the eye, killing him instantly; the other mutilations were post-mortem. Unfortunately, Fletcher was the only one who knew how to find a buyer for the gem, so Dimascio writes, "I left it in his care, to enjoy until I return. Thought, too late, that Luke IV 23 would have been as apt a quotation, but alas, I can hardly kill him twice."

Sleeping Rough

Every night after the PCs open Broken Lance's shield, make a Will roll for each PC. Those who fail will suffer brief but intense nightmares of being attacked or tortured by Comanches (alive or dead), or pursued and eaten by wolves. PCs who already have the Nightmares disadvantage will automatically fail their Will rolls. The dreams require a Fright Check at -2, with a further -1 for every consecutive night.

As well as the nightmares, PCs will also be plagued by unseasonably bad weather -- lightning will hit nearby trees, rain will halve their travel speed (see sidebar, p. B187) -- and the faint but unmistakable sound of wolves howling in the distance at night.

After a few nights of this, a raiding party of Comanches will attempt to steal the PCs horses and weapons. At about 2 a.m., the shaman casts a Slumber spell over the PCs' camp and Obscurity over the raiding party. The Comanches will creep towards the camp, on foot, until they are within 100 yards. If any sentries are awake, the Comanches will try to kill him silently with their short bows. If the camp is alerted, they will retreat stealthily rather than attack.

If no-one is awake when the Comanches arrive, the raiders will steal every animal from the camp, every weapon that is not concealed, all food, and anything else that seems worth taking, but leave the sleeping PCs unharmed.

The PCs will then face the prospect of a 50-mile trek across average terrain to Morrow, or attempting to track the Comanches to recover their gear. After the first day, heavy rain (natural or summoned by the shaman) will slow travel and make the Comanches' tracks even harder to find. Whichever way they go, the PCs will encounter the Comanches again at an opportune moment to rescue Brother Lee and Lupita.

Fire Water

The PCs' introduction to Lee will be the sound of gunfire roughly 400 yards away (a Hearing roll will identify the guns and the approximate distance). The Comanches are circling Lee's jump-seat wagon, and have fired their muskets, wounding Lee in the right arm and torso. Lupita has emptied her shotgun without effect, and is trying to reload. Lee is firing his revolver with his left (off) hand; one Comanche lies dead on the ground. Just as things seem hopeless, Lupita throws a bottle from the back of the wagon; the bottle explodes as it hits the ground, and the Comanches flee.

Brother Lee's wagon is loaded with pint bottles of 'Glastonbury Water,' as well as his and Lupita's personal necessities. Most of the bottles have blue labels, and contain only water; 23 of the remaining bottles, however, contain nitroglycerine, which Lee has smuggled into the U.S. from Mexico and is taking to a mining site to sell.

Lee has a crippled arm and has taken 12 points of damage, plus any damage from bleeding, and will pass out before he can speak to the PCs. Lupita will insist on taking him to Morrow to be tended by the doctor there, and asks the PCs to accompany her, to protect her from any other attack. If her Sex-Appeal skill doesn't persuade them, she'll offer them a share of the profits from selling the nitroglycerine.

Transporting the nitroglycerine will require careful driving; the driver should roll on Teamster skill every four hours of travel. On a critical failure, a bottle will be jarred (see p. OW81), potentially setting off the other bottles. As each bottle does 7dx3 damage, PCs should be allowed some sort of saving throw (such as a DX roll to catch a bottle before it falls) if this happens. The trip should be nerve-racking but non-lethal . . . except for Brother Lee, who will hold out until the wagon reaches Morrow, but die a day later; unless one of the PCs rolls a critical success on Physician, he will never regain consciousness.

When Lee dies, Lupita will try to persuade the PCs to buy the wagon and its cargo or, if they can't or won't reach her minimum price of $5 a bottle (about half the legal price), to accompany her on the trip to Santa Dolores where Lee had arranged to sell it . . . and the shortest route from Salvation to Santa Dolores passes through Rosary.

The Road to Salvation

Morrow is a small town near the Mexican border, built to cater to the farmers and ranchers in the area. Though small with only one street (Front Street), it boasts a newspaper, a well-stocked general store, a doctor, a blacksmith, a livery stable, a photographic studio, a telegraph office, a one-cell jail, two churches (one Catholic, one Baptist), three saloons, and a daily stagecoach service to Salvation, the nearest town to Rosary. A day's research at the newspaper office will reveal that there is a $500 reward offered for the return of the gem that Dimascio stole, which has never been recovered. They will also learn the basic facts about Rosary, 210 miles away.

Badlands: An Adventure for GURPS Old West

Rosary was founded after silver was discovered in the surrounding hills five years ago, and the population quickly grew to about 3,000. Because the surrounding land is so rough (bad terrain for 3d+20 miles in any direction, with a few very bad roads) and the town's population has been declining since it failed in its bid to become the county seat, there is no railway or stage route to Rosary; the nearest stagecoach stop is at Salvation, 33 miles south-south-west.

If the PCs travel from Morrow to Salvation by stagecoach (2 days), the coach will overturn on a bad road a few hours out of Salvation. This requires a Fright Check at -2; damage is 1d-2 for anyone inside the coach, but those seated outside will have to jump free to avoid being crushed under the coach. A successful DX roll will reduce damage to 3d-9 (use Hit Location from a Fall, p. B131); a success on Acrobatics (or default) will reduce damage to zero. A failed DX roll means the character takes 9d crushing damage; a critical failure means that the character is also pinned under the coach, and must be freed before he bleeds to death. The coach is too badly damaged to continue; survivors will have to decide whether to wait 24 hours for the next, or to walk 3d miles along a very bad road in the rain, with wolves howling in the distance. If they wait, Lupita's wagon will pass them 2d+2 hours later.

If the PCs ride horses, walk, or accompany Lupita to Rosary, the main problem will be the slow journey and the nightmares (see *Sleeping Rough*, above), but they may also be bothered by minor mishaps -- flash floods, scorpions in their boots and snakes in their bedrolls, beaver traps and leeches when they cross suddenly swollen rivers, etc.

Salvation

If the PCs pass through Salvation, they will be required to hand their guns over to the sheriff while in town. They will also encounter Old Tom, a grizzled cantankerous ex-prospector.

Old Tom isn't the town drunk, but he's a contender. He will offer to carry the PCs' bags from the stage stop or station to a hotel for the price of a whiskey, he will be mucking out the livery stables if they try to rent some horses, and he will be cadging drinks in any saloon they walk into. When he learns that they're going to Rosary, he'll cackle and mutter, "You'll have a long way to go, stranger, less'n you can ride into last year." He won't say anything more on the subject unless plied with whisky, and as he refuses to drink alone, at least one of the PCs will have to match him whisky for whisky (or fake it somehow) until either Tom or the last PC passes out. Each shot has an Alcohol Rating of 24 (see p. CII162). Don't try this at home.

A successful roll on Interrogation with any drink will get twice as much information out of Tom.

Drinks	Information
1	Most of Rosary was burnt down two winters (about eighteen months) ago.
2	Thirteen people died in the fire, the last to be buried in the cemetery on a hill overlooking the town.

3	A few of the more permanent buildings at one end of town survived, but most folks decided to leave anyway. Most of the silver was gone, and winter was coming. Tom himself had almost given up working his claim by this time, and was making a living as the town's gravedigger.
4	Things had been turning bad in the town since Doc Fletcher was murdered. Tom remembers the incident well; shootings were common in town, and most men there died with their boots on, but he'd never seen a man before who'd been killed with a knife while reaching for his gun. Fletcher was the last person killed in town before the fire, a few weeks later.
5	The locals wanted to string up the man who they thought had killed Fletcher, a gambler named Luce, but he'd disappeared by the time they found the body.
6	Luce was an olive-skinned man with black curly hair, a moustache, and dark deep-set eyes. About six feet tall, dressed in black like a preacher, carried a silver-headed cane, didn't drink hardly at all. (This matches most descriptions of Dimascio.)
7	The fire didn't reach the cemetery -- just as well, too, since all the gravestones were just boards, carved and painted.
8	The last burials were buried near the north end of the graveyard.
9	The only undertaker in Rosary was a coffin-maker and cartwright named Rogan. He told Tom that he couldn't disguise the wounds on Fletcher's face, and gave him a closed casket funeral. The man who pronounced him dead was a horse doctor and blacksmith named Boetsch.
10	Rogan and Boetsch came to Salvation after Rosary was burned down; Rogan works as a carpenter, and has a house next to the Boetsch's smithy.

If Tom tells the PCs everything he knows before passing out, begin the obligatory bar brawl. A cowboy playing poker at the next table turns the table over to reveal a holdout device underneath, containing several cards and a stingy pistol. Being unarmed, the cowboy and his friends grab brawling weapons, as do the townspeople. A billiard ball hurled at one cowboy by a soiled dove hits Old Tom instead, instantly knocking him unconscious. PCs may hide, try to sneak out, or join in.

If the PCs speak to Rogan or Boetsch, and they have a Neutral or better reaction to the PCs, they will confirm what Old Tom has said. On a Good or better reaction, they will also add that apart from the clothes he was buried in, Fletcher's belongings were divided between the saloonkeeper, the town marshal, and Rogan and Boetsch. Rogan kept a few dollars; Boetsch kept his watch and surgical tools; neither saw anything else of value, and neither knows where the marshal or the saloonkeeper went after Rosary burnt down. Boetsch will sell the watch for $5, the black bag for $25; neither contains the gem, nor any useful clues.

Rosary

What the PCs find in Rosary will depend on the nature of the campaign. Only four buildings remain standing: two saloons, a general store (also the bank and post office), and a jail (two cells and an office for the marshal). All have been looted of any valuables, but they may provide useful hiding places for the PCs or their opponents. The cells have 6" stone walls, 1/2" iron bars, and a 2" wooden slab roof; other buildings are of 1" wooden slab.

In a *realistic* campaign, the PCs will find Rosary's cemetery occupied by miners, engineers and guards. A mining baron has learned that the hill beneath the cemetery contains enough copper ore to be worth mining. He's hired 40 convict laborers to dig up the graves, dumping headstones and bodies into a nearby abandoned mineshaft. The PCs can wait until the graveyard is cleared and search for Fletcher's body in the dangerously unstable shaft, or try sneaking into the cemetery that night before Fletcher's grave marker is removed. The convicts are too heavily chained to be a menace to the PCs (unless an escape is organized), but there are at least ten guards (use 'Hired Guns', below). To complicate

matters, one of the guards may be an enemy of one of the PCs -- or one of the convicts may be a friend, dependent or a member of an ally group. Alternatively, the convicts may manage to overpower their guard and grab some weapons, forcing the PCs to choose sides. The guards are billeted in the marshal's office and the saloon next door; the convicts sleep at night, in chains and under guard, in the store.

In a *weird* campaign, Rosary is almost literally a ghost town; instead of convict labor, the digging is being done by 40 zombis, and intruders are even less welcome. The houngan controlling the zombis, Pierre Legrand, has taken over the marshal's office, and sleeps on the bare bunk in one of the cells, on which he's performed a makeshift consecration. In a cinematic (high powered) weird campaign, Legrand may be a skin-changer; he may also be Dimascio under another name, returned to collect the sapphire.

If the PCs have come to Rosary without Brother Lee's nitroglycerine and need extra firepower, have Lupita arrive with the wagon and an accomplice (use stats for Hired Gun) in time to rescue them. Of course, her help won't come cheap . . .

Resurrection Men

If the PCs go looking for Fletcher's grave, they will find the marker badly weathered; Vision -5 to read the inscription, "Dr George Fletcher, murdered 18--.". Fletcher is buried 4' down, in a thin wooden coffin, fully dressed, with his boots under his head as a pillow and a red bandana covering his mutilated face. The markers on the graves surrounding him read "Joe Wells, Died With His Boots On 18--", and "Ella Garcia, 18--. Duerme bien." (Sleep well).

A search of Fletcher's clothes, however thorough, will not uncover the sapphire. Dissecting the body won't help, either, but that's no reason to prevent the PCs from trying. The stone is actually hidden in the hollow heel of Fletcher's left boot (the right is also hollow, but empty). If the *players* don't think of searching the boots, it should occur to Lupita or any *character* who makes a roll on Holdout at -5.

Faith to Faith

The PCs should continue to suffer nightmares intermittently until the first to touch Broken Lance's shield has a vision, in which he sees a wolf telling him to destroy the papers taken from the shield. The nightmares will continue until he does this; after that, Broken Lance will appear to the PC in a dream, armed with Dimascio's knife. The PC's hit points will be equivalent to his Will, not HT or ST. If the PC is 'killed' in the dream, he must make a HT roll (+/- Will bonuses) or die; if he survives, the PCs' nightmares will stop. If he defeats Broken Lance in the dream, he will acquire Wolf as a Guardian Spirit, though this will only be apparent to Herbalists, Dreamers or Shamans, who will react to him at +1 after this, and the PCs' nightmares will stop. If he surrenders, he will acquire -10 points of disadvantages that must be bought off (Nightmares and Post-Combat Shakes would be appropriate, as would Unluckiness or Aichomophobia).

Cast

Bigger Bear, Comanche Warrior

Early 20s; bronzed skin, black hair, dark eyes; 5'9", 150 lbs.

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 11; **HT** 11.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive); Charisma +1; Guardian Spirit (Thunder); High Pain Threshold; Language Talent +1; Semi-Literate
Disadvantages: Compulsive Gambling; Curious; Overconfidence
Quirks: Tends to exaggerate.

Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-11; Axe/Mace-12; Bard-14; Bow-13; Gambling-13; Guns (Rifle)-13; Languages (Comanche)-12, (English)-10, (Spanish)-10; Merchant-11; Riding (Horse)-12; Sign Language (Plains)-10; Stealth-13; Tracking-13; Wrestling-11.
Equipment: Indian Musket; Short Bow and 30 arrows; Coup Stick; Bowie Knife; Shield (PD 3; DR 6; Damage 10/40); Pony.

Bigger Bear is named for a story he tells of a bear he encountered when a young man; when an older warrior dryly commented that the bear grew larger every time the story was told, the young brave became known as Bigger Bear.

Bitten by Cats, Comanche Warrior

Late teens; bronzed skin, scarred face, black hair, dark eyes; 5'8", 100 lbs.

ST 11; **DX** 12; **IQ** 10; **HT** 11.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Animal Empathy; Combat Reflexes; Fit; Guardian Spirit (Thunder); High Pain Threshold.
Disadvantages: Overconfidence; Skinny.
Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-13; Axe/Mace-12; Bow-13; Fast-Draw (Arrow)-13, (Rifle)-13; Gambling-12; Guns (Rifle)-13; Language (Comanche)-10; Riding (Horse)-16; Running-12; Stealth-12; Tracking-14.
Equipment: Indian Musket; Short Bow and 30 arrows; Coup Stick; Metal Tomahawk; Shield (PD 3; DR 6; Damage 10/40); Pony (Move 14).

Broken Lance, Comanche Warrior

Early 20s; bronzed skin, black hair, dark eyes; 5'11", 160 lbs.

ST 13; **DX** 13; **IQ** 10; **HT** 13.
  Move 6.

Advantages: Combat Reflexes; Fearlessness/3; Guardian Spirit (Wolf); High Pain Threshold; Rapid Healing; Toughness (DR 1); Very Fit.
Disadvantages: Berserk; Great Vows (Never Retreat in Battle, -15; Wolf Dreamer vows, -11); Overconfidence.
Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-12; Axe/Mace-14; Axe Throwing-13; Bow-14; Fast-Draw (Arrow)-14; Gambling-9; Guns (Rifle)-14; Knife-13; Knife Throwing-12; Lance-14; Riding (Horse)-13; Running-14; Tracking-11; Stealth-13; Wrestling-13.
Equipment: Indian Musket; Compound Short Bow and 30 arrows; Coup Stick; Lance; Arkansas Toothpick; Tomahawk; Shield (PD 4; DR 6; Damage 10/40); Pony.

Broken Lance is named for a battle he had with an Apache warrior; the Apache's lance penetrated his shield before breaking, leaving the head stuck in Broken Lance's arm. Broken Lance grabbed the shaft of the lance and dragged the Apache from his horse, returning to camp with the horse, the broken lance, and the Apache's scalp. Wolf appeared to him that night, giving him a vision of a tougher shield -- including the books that would be needed to construct it.

Brother Lee, Confidence Man and smuggler

Late 40s; 5'9, 160 lbs; tanned skin, blue eyes, mane of silver hair with full beard.

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 12; **HT** 8.
  Move 4.

Advantages: Charisma +2; Voice.
Disadvantages: Greed; Overconfidence.
Skills: Acting-12; Animal Handling (Mule, Horse)-11; Bard-15; Boxing-12; Disguise-12; Fast-Talk-14; Gambling-

13; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-14, (Shotgun)-13, (Rifle)-11; Fast-Draw (Pistol)-11; Hold-out-12; Mechanic/TL5 (Wagon)-10; Merchant-13; Musical Instrument (Banjo)-11; Occultism-10; Pickpocket-11; Psychology-11; Riding (Horse)-10; Running-9; Stealth-11; Teamster-11; Theology-10; Whip-10.
Equipment: S&W Model 2; Bullwhip. Wears black suit, Stetson, and cowboy boots.

Comanche Warrior

ST 11; **DX** 11; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Fearlessness/2; Fit; High Pain Threshold.
Disadvantages: Warrior's Code of Honor.
Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-11; Axe/Mace-12; Bow-13; Fast-Draw (Arrow)-11; Gambling-11; Guns (Rifle)-13; Knife-11; Languages (Comanche)-10; Riding (Horse)-12; Running-10; Stealth-13; Tracking-13.
Equipment: Indian Musket or Spencer Carbine; Short Bow and 30 arrows; Coup Stick; War Club, Tomahawk or Large Knife; Shield (PD 3; DR 6; Damage 10/40); Pony.

Convict Laborer

ST 13; **DX** 10; **IQ** 9; **HT** 10.
  Move 5.

Advantages: High Pain Threshold.
Disadvantages: At least one of the following: Bad Temper; Bully; Greed; Impulsiveness; Outlaw's Code of Honor; Overconfidence.
Skills: Brawling-12; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-14, (other)-10; Holdout-11; Intimidation-13; Knife-11; Riding (Horse)-10; Stealth-10; other Thief skills-12.
Equipment: Pick or shovel.

Hired Gun

ST 12; **DX** 13; **IQ** 10; **HT** 11.
  Move 6.

Advantages: Alertness +1; Combat Reflexes; Reputation (Fast Gun, +1)
Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Bloodlust; Enemies (Gunslinger's Enemies)
Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-11; Brawling-13; Carousing-12; Fanning-12; Fast-Draw (Revolver)-14; Gambling-12; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-16, (Shotgun)-14, (Rifle)-13; Holdout-11; Intimidation-13; Knife-11; Knife Throwing-11; Riding (Horse)-12; Sap-12; Speed-Load (Revolver)-11; Stealth-11; Tactics-11.
Equipment: Colt Peacemaker; Double barrel Shotgun or Magazine Carbine; Arkansas Toothpick; Cartridge belt; Suit, Overcoat, Stetson, Cowboy Boots; Saddle Horse; Bedroll.

Lupita

20 years old; 5'6", 115 lbs; olive skin, waist-length black hair, dark eyes. Quirks: Usually wears black and red.

ST 9; **DX** 11; **IQ** 11; **HT** 12.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Appearance (Attractive); Charisma +1; Language Talent +1.
Disadvantages: Greed; Overconfidence; Post-combat shakes.
Skills: Acting-12; Animal Handling (Mule)-9; Cooking-10; Dancing-13; Disguise-13; Fast-Talk-13; First Aid/TL5-10; Gambling-12; Guns (Pistol)-11, (Shotgun)-11; Holdout-12; Knife-11; Language (Spanish)-12, (Comanche,

English, French)-10; Pickpocket-13; Psychology-10; Sex-Appeal-14; Scrounging-12; Singing-11; Stealth-10; Streetwise-13; Teamster-10; Throwing-11.

Equipment: Double barrel 20g shotgun; small knife concealed in hair. Wears shirt, boots and trousers while traveling, and a dress while in town. Spare clothes, rations, ammo, gun cleaning kit, etc., in travel trunk in wagon.

Pierre Legrand, voodoo houngan

Early 40s; 5'11", 107 lbs; brown skin, bald, dark brown eyes. Wears a Confederate Officer's gray coat, a battered top hat, and cavalry boots.

ST 10; **DX** 11; **IQ** 14; **HT** 10.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Autotrance; Charm (Ghost Shirt); Initiation (Third Level); Mystic Symbol (necklace, +2); Metabolism Control/1; Night Vision.
Disadvantages: Appearance (Unattractive); Bully; Sadist; Skinny; Social Stigma (Mulatto, -2 on all reaction rolls).
Paths and Rituals: Path of the Spirit-14; Raise Zombi-14; Path of Protection-13; Ghost Shirt-13; Obscurity-13; Path of Dreams-10; Path of Health-10; Path of Luck-10.
Skills: Brawling-11; Detect Lies-13; Fast-Talk-14; Fencing-12; Gambling-13; Guns/TL5 (Pistol)-14; Language (Creole)-14, (English, French, Spanish)-12; Occultism-14; Riding (Horse)-10; Ritual Magic-16; Scrounging-13; Stealth-10; Streetwise-13.
Equipment: S&W Model 2 in leather-lined pocket; Saber; pocket knife; bed roll; week's rations; bottle of whiskey; saddle horse; $42 in gold coins.

Old Tom, Prospector

Late 60s; balding, with some gray hair and scraggly gray beard, hazel eyes; 5'6", 130 lbs. Wears ragged buckskins, sombrero, and boots.

ST 10; **DX** 10; **IQ** 10; **HT** 9.
  Move 4.

Advantages: Alcohol Tolerance.
Disadvantages: Age; Alcoholism; Appearance (Unattractive); Miserliness; Odious Personal Habits (Rarely washes, -2 to reaction rolls); Poverty (Struggling).
Skills: Animal Handling (Donkey)-11; Brawling-10; Carousing-11; Gambling-11; Guns/TL5 (Shotgun)-12, (Rifle)-10; Packing-10; Prospecting-12; Scrounging-13; Survival (Mountains)-11.
Equipment: Shotgun, mining tools, and burro at shack.

Smells Water, Comanche Warrior

Late teens; bronzed skin, black hair, dark eyes; 5'8", 140 lbs.

ST 12; **DX** 13; **IQ** 10; **HT** 10.
  Move 5.

Advantages: Alertness +3; Fit; Guardian Spirit (Eagle); High Pain Threshold.
Disadvantages: Bad Temper; Minor Vows (Eagle warrior).
Skills: Animal Handling (Horse)-10; Axe/Mace-13; Bow-14; Gambling-11; Guns (Rifle)-16; Language (Comanche)-10; Riding (Horse)-13; Stealth-13; Tracking-11.
Equipment: Kentucky Rifle; Short Bow and 30 arrows; Coup Stick; War Club; Metal Tomahawk; Shield (PD 3; DR 6; Damage 10/40); Pony.

Zombis

ST 13; **DX** 10; **IQ** 7; **HT** 10/15.
  Move 4.

Advantages: Doesn't Breathe; Doesn't Eat or Drink; Doesn't Sleep; Extra Hit Points +5; High Pain Threshold; Immunity to Disease; Immunity to Poison; Injury Tolerance (No Blood); Invulnerability (Mind Control); Night Vision; Single-Minded; Temperature Tolerance; Unaging; Unfazeable.
Disadvantages: Bad Smell; Cannot Learn; Monstrous Appearance; No Sense of Humor; No Sense of Smell/Taste; Obdurate; Reduced Move; Reprogrammable Duty; Slave Mentality; Social Stigma (Dead); Unhealing; Unliving; Vulnerability (4d from salt).
Skills: Brawling-12; Knife-11.
Equipment: Pick or shovel.

Should a zombi be crippled, or even lose a limb, it will continue to fight. A zombi with a missing foot moves at 4. With a missing leg, it hops along at 2; legless but with at least one arm, it drags itself along at 1.

Only a little salt is needed to kill a zombi, but it must be poured into the zombi's mouth to be effective.

Biblical Quotations

Proverbs XXVII 17 reads "Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend."; Luke IV 23 is "Physician, heal thyself."; Mark VIII 24 is "I see men as trees, walking."

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Different Engines: Alternate Steampunks

"The real Age of Steam was a specific period in Earth's history, and most steampunk is set in that period. But with more radical divergences, it's possible to imagine similar technologies in other settings . . . ."
-- William H. Stoddard, **GURPS Steampunk**, p. 11

It's not just possible -- it's downright irresistible. As a celebration of the perfected apparatus of brass gears and whirling pistons that is **GURPS Steampunk**, here are three more somewhat less-Worked Examples of vaporous alternate histories. Take a deep whiff of coal-smoke, brush back your whiskers, and let's set the ether crackling.

"The shape of the boiler having been determined at pleasure, in that part of it intended to hold the water a small chamber, perfectly air-tight, is intercepted between two perpendicular partitions. With this chamber a tube, one of those which pass under the coals, communicates near the bottom, one end of the tube being closed that no water may enter it from the boiler: the other tubes lead into the chamber where the water is. Thus when the coals are ignited they will generate steam through that tube which leads into the small chamber. This steam is carried along a tube which pierces the surface of the boiler, and through the mouth of the figure on to the coals, (for the figure must be bent so as to blow downwards;) and as steam is always being generated, the figure is always blowing. The steam is generated from the fire, and, if we pour a very small quantity of water into the small chamber, we shall produce more steam, and the figure, blowing with great violence, will heat the boiler still higher."
-- Hero of Alexandria, *Pneumatica*, LXXIV

Was it the patronage of the priests of Hephaistos, still influential in Egypt in honor of Alexander's lost love Hephaistion? Was it the desperate eagerness of General Vespasian to find something, anything, that would batter down the infernally stubborn walls of Jerusalem? Was it simply a case of academic politics going right for a change? Whatever the reason, Hero received a munificent grant for his own Museum, charged with developing Ktesibos' 200-year old design for compressed-air cannon for the Roman legions. Joining experimental petroleum boilers to machined bronze, and using his own aeolipile as a steam engine to power the device, Hero watched his "Aeolian onager" smash Masada to powder at ranges far beyond what rope and sinew could achieve. Before his death, he had also invented aeolibosae ("Aeolian oxen") to drag the infernal devices across the Rhine and Danube to smash the Germans and Dacians, and "aeolicthyne" ships which could cross the Mediterranean in record time. Trajan conquered the petroleum fields of Mesopotamia and Persia, ensuring the Empire of an unbroken supply of the "Aeolian fluid". During the plagues under Marcus Aurelius, Aeolian engines sowed and reaped the crops, replacing the decimated peasantry.

Now, in 180 A.D., Marcus Aurelius' son Commodus takes the throne of an Empire that stretches from the misty Insulae Hesperes in the west to the borders of India, linked by Aeolian-graded roads, defended by aeolipilum-wielding mechanized legions, and driven by the cthonian petroleum pumps of Babylon. Aeolicar battles in the Colosseum feed the crowd's frenzy, and make millions for patrician owners and their Egyptian engineers. The plebeian "charioteers," however, may want a piece of the action -- and they may not care how they get it. This **GURPS Steampunk-Imperial Rome-Autoduel** campaign can center on rebel Aeolicar fighters battling it out in the arena, dueling on behalf of their patrons on the wide highways of the Empire, or rising up against Commodus' mad attempts to control all Aeolian technology for himself. PCs can be Roman mobile infantry fighting a blitzkrieg in India, street gangs in Rome or Alexandria rumbling over turf, noble conspirators against the mad and decadent Commodus -- or, of course, greasy-haired punks racing and dueling Aeolicars, playing that new-fangled Nubian music, and being hassled by the vigiles. Hey, pater-o! Wanna drag?

"The attraction of a magnet for iron is like that of amber for the smallest grain of mustard seed. It is like a breath of wind which mysteriously penetrates through both, and communicates itself with the speed of an arrow."
-- Kuo Fu (4th century AD)

The Chinese had magnetic compasses as early as the 3rd millennium B.C. They had lightning rods and understood the interrelationship between amber, metals, and electricity in the late Han era of Kuo Fu. By the turn of the first millennium A.D., they had invented the blast furnace, and produced over 35,000 tons of steel annually from coke-burning smelters. All the Song Dynasty needed was a little spark. During the wide-ranging reforms of the minister

Wang Anshi in the 1060s, the mandarinate was in turmoil, and new ideas rose to the fore without obstruction. From a mixture of Taoist alchemy, magnetism, and astronomy came the first electric batteries and dynamos. After Wang Anshi's personal acupuncturist used the new devices to cure the Emperor Zhenxong's near-fatal illness of 1085, no bureaucrat could stop the electrical revolution. Coke-fired electrical motors soon powered weapons factories and shipyards across the Empire, putting guns and rockets into the hands of the entire army. The northern barbarians fell back, then offered tribute -- a brief and pointless rebellion in 1206 by a minor Mongol khan named Temujin was easily crushed by repeater-armed Song troops lifted in by electric gliders.

Shen Yu's improved astronomical techniques, and the insights of Taoist philosophers, led to the discovery of the tian-qi (or, as the newly translated Greek scrolls taken from Central Asia called it, the "ether") that joined all the stars and planets together. The first tian-qi ships reached the Moon in 1247 (after a brief expedition around the world to gather tribute from lesser monarchs), and skimmed the clouds of the inner world Taibaixing two years later. In 1254, Imperial canal-builders arrived on the red planet Yinghuo to study its canal network; they became the nexus of a thriving trade entrepot for rare metals, mysterious herbs, and finely worked silicates and ceramics. PCs in this **GURPS Steampunk-China** campaign can be Western traders (perhaps including a young Marco Polo) trying any angle to break into the Electrical-Celestial Empire's economy, Imperial mandarins keeping watch on the planetary frontiers (the tall, inscrutable people of Yinghuo are rumored to possess subtle mental powers and strange combat techniques), or explorers seeking new adventures under Heaven.

"[T]he old energy of the Norse race arms itself with these magnificent powers; new men prove an over-match for the land-owner, and the mill buys out the castle. Scandinavian Thor, who once forged his bolts in icy Hecla, and built galleys by lonely fiords; in England, has advanced with the times, has shorn his beard, enters Parliament, sits down at a desk in the India House, and lends Miollnir to Birmingham for a steam-hammer."
-- Ralph Waldo Emerson, *English Traits*

It only took forty years of inhumanly patient tinkering, in his forge-hall below Gotland, but Durin Redbeard had done it -- taken the human Roger Bacon's airy theological notions of a steam-driven engine and brought it into the real world of iron and brass and coal. As always, if you want something done right, you're better off asking a dwarf. And, although the new steam engines helped Sweden's mills and shipyards prosper, King Magnus II seemed unable to grasp that basic principle no matter how many times dwarvish silver bailed him out. So, rewrite the constitution in 1359 to give dwarves a majority on the Riskdag. Dwarvish steamships swept the Baltic clear of Danish ships in 1370, and the dwarf-lords got positions in the Hanseatic League in return -- after only two human generations (at compound interest), the dwarves wound up running the German economy. No problem -- lots of coal in Germany. Once the dwarves applied their engineering proclivities to tactics, the Germans even made decent fighters, wheeling and firing the new explosive-powder rifled flintlocks in clockwork fashion. Of course, you had to have dwarven commanders for the units, or the Germans would fall to fighting each other over who was pope or something equally foolish. Not as foolish as starting a whole war over roses, though -- that, you had to leave to the English. All that ruckus interfered with orderly business, had to land some Germans and some cannon off the new ironclads and bombard London, teach them how things work. Put Henry Percy on the throne, from a good Northumberland family, go back a long way with dwarves, they do. Have to put off straightening out this mess in Italy for awhile, though -- word has it there's gold just lying around to be taken in the new lands to the west.

In this Renaissance-era **GURPS Steampunk-Fantasy Folk** campaign, the dwarves have a racial Gadgeteering proclivity, long lives, and a newly-aggressive attitude toward cleaning up an untidy Europe. Renaissance humanity's reaction to being the colonial subjects and economic underlings of saga-spawned surly steam-lords can drive a game of comical neo-Pratchettian misadventure, or one of "rapierpunk" action as "Leonardo the Tall" leads a network of resistance gadgeteers in the name of Humanitas. Introducing human ritual magic, or American elves, or a dwarvish civil war can stir things up even more. Heigh-ho!

Pyramid Review

Star Wars Roleplaying Game

Published by [Wizards of the Coast](#)

Written by Andy Collins, Bill Slavicsek, and JD Wiker

320 pages; $34.95

Following in the footsteps of a phenomenally successful predecessor is never easy.
Not only to do you have to contend with the inevitable comparisons to your illustrious forebear, but there will always be die-hard partisans of "the original" who are not only unwilling to accept your mere existence -- they go out of their way to slander you and work to bring about your failure. You can see this kind of behavior all time, whether it be in entertainment, literature, or politics.

Consequently, I don't envy the position of the designers of WotC's new *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*. Even had their game been perfect in its design and presentation, there still would have been a chorus of naysayers and hardcore West End enthusiasts who wished them ill will. Fortunately, *Star Wars* is a solid enough design that its critics may be drowned out by the din of its supporters -- many of them newcomers -- attracted by the game's high production values and ease of play. Of course, this won't deter the critics, particularly since at least some of their criticisms are dead-on.

As most people know, WotC's *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is the first non-D&D game to use the much-vaunted "D20 system." At its heart, this system consists of a collection of core characters stats (the familiar Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, Intelligence, Wisdom, and Charisma), a feat and skill system, and a unified mechanic that compares a D20 roll plus modifiers versus a difficulty class. In theory, everything else (character classes, hit points, etc.) is negotiable, subject to change according to the needs of the setting or genre using the system.

For the most part, *Star Wars* avails itself of relatively few of these potential options. The game still has character classes and levels, for example. While the aforementioned critics will undoubtedly scream, "It's *D&D* in space," their comment is both accurate and irrelevant. There can be no question that *Star Wars* bears a lot of similarities to the latest edition of *D&D*; that was clearly intentional. Given the popularity of *D&D*, this is both a logical marketing and design choice. However, *Star Wars* has always been more of a fantasy setting with science fiction trappings than straight SF. If you doubt this, *Episode I* made this fact abundantly clear. Given that, the match between *D&D*-esque rules and the *Star Wars* setting is not as jarring as one might expect.

Moreover, the designers changed just enough from *D&D* to overcome most -- but not all -- of the dissonance between the venerable fantasy game's conventions and those of the *Star Wars* universe. For example, multiclassing carries no experience point penalty for uneven levels, allowing a player to add classes (and their abilities) more freely. Likewise, hit points are now divided between vitality points (which increase with level) and wound points (which are equal to Constitution and rarely increase). Ordinary damage comes off vitality points, while damage dealt by critical hits comes directly off wound points. A character who loses all his vitality points is merely unconscious, while one who loses all his wound points is dead. Ordinary Gamemaster Characters (like stormtroopers) have no vitality points are thus dispatched with relative ease.

In a similar fashion, the game avoids the "kill the monsters" style of experience point awards. Instead, points are awarded on the basis of the length of the adventure compared to the average level of the characters involved. The number of opponents defeated thus has no bearing on the experience points awarded. It's a reasonable system, designed to increase a group of four characters one level for every long adventure, every two medium adventures, or every four

short adventures. It's not a perfect system by any means, but it goes a long way toward excising yet another potentially inappropriate *D&D*-ism from the *D20* system. In fact, I found myself wishing *D&D* included such a system, as it's closer to the way I award experience in my more story-driven campaigns.

Like *D&D*, the heart of *Star Wars* is its skill and feat system. But for the addition of new technological skills and feats, the only significant wrinkle is the addition of Force related feats and skills. To use Force abilities requires one possess the feat "Force Sensitive." With that feat, one can then become trained in the use of the Force (which is to say, become a Jedi or Force Adept), allowing the acquisition of additional feats and skills. Most Force feats have prerequisites of either other Force feats or Force skills, meaning players will need to choose their abilities with care, especially if they wish to acquire some of the more exotic -- and powerful -- Force powers.

The game provides a large number of races to choose from: everything from Rodians to Wookiees to Cereans and (yes) Gungans are available in the core rulebook. Like *D&D*, each race has its own advantages and disadvantages. However, the greater flexibility of the multiclass rules means that humans have only the increased skill points to start and bonus feat to recommend them (not that I mind). The characters classes (fringer, noble, scoundrel, scout, soldier, Force adept, Jedi guardian, and Jedi consular) are reasonably well-balanced against one another. Some (like the scoundrel and soldier) are simply *D&D* classes renamed with mild tweaks here and there. Others (like all the Force users) are more original and are sure to prove popular. All offer something of interest, ensuring that multiclass characters may well be the norm in *Star Wars* campaigns.

The book is a complete game. In addition to character creation and combat rules, it includes chapters on aliens, starships, robots, and an overview of the *Star Wars* universe (including stats for noteworthy characters). There is also a useful appendix containing rough guidelines for converting West End Games vintage characters to the *D20* system. Although the game supports three eras of *Star Wars* play (*Episode I*, *Classic Trilogy*, and the *New Jedi Order* of the novels), there is a subtle emphasis on the *Episode I* period, based solely on various examples (and the sample adventure), as well as the preponderance of stills from that film. Again, this is a valid marketing approach, but it may give critics yet another excuse to avoid the game. (Interestingly, the much-reviled Jar Jar Binks never appears in the book in any form.)

In the end, the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game* is a solid piece of work, but is definitely not for everyone. Enough holdovers from the *D&D* origins of *D20* exist that it may rankle gamers looking for something more "sophisticated." At the same time, this is probably a selling point for newcomers introduced to roleplaying through *D&D*. Of more genuine concern is WotC's upcoming slate of products, most of which seem to recycle plot elements from the films rather than strike out in new directions as West End did so well. Again, this concern may simply reveal my own "inner critic," but I believe it's something of which to take note.

Even so, WotC has clearly given *Star Wars* the care it deserves as a roleplaying property. It'll be interesting to see how it -- and the *D20* system -- develops over the course of the next few years.

-- James Maliszewski

Things to be Thankful For

Well, as foretold by the prophets (despite being a non-prophet organization), here's my Thanksgiving column. (And I'm sorry for all you non-United States-ers out there; these kinds of columns are part of our holiday-type rituals. Maybe I'll try to write a Boxing Day column or something to balance the scales.) This time, I'm going to say how thankful I am for the state of diversity in the industry.

A couple of months ago, I realized what a great time it is to be a gamer. As I look through my collection, I consider that I could run rich and entertaining games in almost any genre, without much effort. I could create an Alternate Earths game, a conspiracy game, a modern game of plotting vampires, a steampunk universe, or a 1920's Cthulhu campaign . . . all with about an evening of planning.

Consider how different this is from a mere twenty years ago. Back then, If I wanted to run, say, a western game, there was really only one option: ***Boot Hill***. But with just a casual glance across my shelf, I see I could run three different western games, and they'd all be a blast. In the early 80's, if I wanted to run a science fiction game, there were two options: ***Star Frontiers*** and ***Traveller***. Today I could run ten . . . including ***Traveller***. I'm hard-pressed to come up with a time when there were more talented creators making games and gaming supplements than now.

Less than a decade ago, TSR successfully stopped Mayfair from producing any more of their ***AD&D***-compatible material from their ***Role Aids*** line. Today, Wizards of the Coast is on the cusp of actively and officially *encouraging* companies to manufacture alternate material. Hopefully this will result in interesting and divergent material for the granddaddy of RPGs (itself having been newly reinvented), since these other companies aren't limited by pre-conceived notions of what has gone before.

Wizards of the Coast has also released over fifty supplements of ***AD&D 2nd Edition*** material for free in PDF format on their website. I've already used many of these items in other campaigns: dungeon plans, overland maps, illustrations, and other goodies are all easily stolen for a variety of uses. These supplements are probably worth almost $1000 in their original paper forms. *And* they've released other out-of-print goodies via electronic downloads for $2.95 each. "The first hit's free," as they say, but the mere availability of these downloads is another thing I'm thankful to WotC for.

The Internet itself is also a true godsend for gamers. Besides delivering the best gaming magazines *<koff> <koff>*, the Internet has made previously nigh-impossible research easily accessible for GMs and players. Just last week, in our ***Fading Suns*** game, our GM downloaded Latin translations of Murphy's Laws of Combat for the Brother Battle church knights. *Si hostes visibilis, etiam tu,* indeed. Likewise fans can create and disseminate material easier than any previous time. There is currently more free gaming material available on-line than I'd ever have time to read, and some of it is brilliant. And the Internet means community; if you need advice or answers or things to think about, there's more options available than any time before. (A sidebar "Thanks!" to the **sjgames.roleplaying** regulars, who've regularly answered my arcane questions . . . usually involving Storyteller probabilities.)

There are more systems in print than ever before. With the plethora of systems out there, I can probably find (or modify/create) a game that's within a hair's breadth of my desires. Complex or simple, elegant or intricate, diceless or diceful . . . there are possibilities beyond imagining. And with a little bit of searching on services like eBay, you can get material that's out of print easier than any time previous!

And I'm thankful for other aspects of gaming goodness, too. A mere decade ago the minigame seemed dead. Cheapass Games proved that wrong, and other companies have followed suit. Perhaps the perfect stocking stuffers, the current crop of minigames are something truly wonderful for my Friday night group gatherings. And, there's more gamerly comics, magazines, columns and other related diversions out there than any time in recent memory, for those times when you *can't* game.

Is the industry perfect? Of course not; things can always get better. And I definitely don't think those who make this hobby possible should stop trying to do even better. But in my mind it's often easy to focus on the bits that annoy or

upset us, while losing sight of how much there is to be thankful for currently.

So, for all the creators, retailers, and fans, thanks for making this a great time to be a gamer.

-- Steven Marsh
  Pyramid Editor Who Ate Way *Too Much Turkey*

* * *

Last week's answer: **Time Lord**, p. 39. (Based on the *Doctor Who* universe, this game is available, along with other loot, *free* [online](#)! This is a great time to be a gamer!)

(Also note that **Time Lord** was written by Ian Marsh [!] and Peter Darvill-Evans.)

(Three stars) "Guideline #1: Temporal Prime is a pseudoreality, not a plane of existence."

"Duke" Samuel Thaddeus Brunswick

by Loki Carbis

Art colord by Keith Johnson

Born: February 17, 1909.

Age 25-35; A youthful man with blonde hair and gray eyes. He is dressed in practical, no-nonsense clothes that are usually in need of cleaning and repair. His face bears a determined expression, and his dominant trait is an unwillingness to suffer fools.

ST 12 [20] **DX** 13 [30] **IQ** 15 [60] **HT** 12 [20]
Speed: 6.25, Move: 4.
Dodge: 4 Parry: 7.

Advantages: Collected (5); Common Sense (10); Gadgeteer (50); Longevity (5); Mathematical Ability (10); Single-Minded (5); Unusual Background: Owner of the Manual for Life (115 points; see below).

Disadvantages: Attentive (-1); Curious (-5); Loner (-5); Low Empathy (-15); Proud (-1); Reduced Move 2 (-10); Secret: Owner of the Manual for Life (Possible Death, -30); Workaholic (-5).

Skills: Brawling-15 (4); Driving (Automobile)-16 (16); Chemistry-16 (6); Engineer (Clockwork)-16 (2); Engineer (Electronics)-18 (6); Engineer (Vehicles)-17 (4) Mathematics-21 (10); Mechanic-(most specializations)-19 (8); Motorcycle-15 (8); Physics-20 (14); Professional Skill: Book-Binding-14 (1); Professional Skill: Librarianship-16 (4); Research-18 (8); Science!-15 (8); Temporal Electronics-18 (10), Temporal Operation-16 (default); Temporal Physics-17 (16); Weird Science-17 (16).

Quirks:
   Cares for humanity, but not particularly for individual humans.   Hates to be called "Sammy"; tolerates being called "Sam."   Irascible   Squeamish   Tries to avoid any romantic contact with the opposite sex.

Total Points: 394

This is the Duke at any time from roughly 1926-1956, on average, his creative peak and his heyday as a two-fisted adventurer. Depending on which incarnation you are using, he could well have different advantages, disadvantage and skills.

The Manual for Life has been classed as an Unusual Background. It has a sliding point value, being assumed to be

worth an average of 5 points times the number of the current edition. Adjust point values according if you're using an earlier incarnation of the Duke.

The inclusion of the Science! And Weird Science skills is a shortcut for describing the Duke's vast knowledge and ability to incorporate new data, no matter how startling. GM's should keep in mind that is does not extend to biology, medicine, psychology or any of their specializations. Each incarnation of the Duke had slightly different skills -- but also had access to simple and easy to follow instructions on any skill any preceding incarnation had possessed, via the Manual for Life.

Life

Samuel Brunswick's early life was unexceptional. Born in 1909, he was raised by his parents in Perfection, Nevada. The defining event of his childhood was the death of his father in the Great War. Due to the poor quality of communications technologies in 1918, George Brunswick was shot and killed an hour after the Armistice was signed.

This effect of this tragic and ironic event on young Samuel was twofold. Firstly, it caused him to withdraw from other people -- his father had been the most important person in his life, and he was determined not to be hurt like that again. And second, he began to study much harder, transforming from an average student to a prodigy over the next year. It seems that he did not wish for anyone else to be hurt like him either.

By the time he was 13, he had begun studies at MIT. The next few years saw his character continue to form along the lines it had already begun to take, while his eclectic interests saw him change institutions a dozen times in the next decade. His personality, which was never terribly sociable, became increasingly distant, even arrogant, and his nickname, given him in 1921, is a reflection of his aristocratic temperament.

First Incarnation

The Duke was a restless and driven man. A polymath and scientific genius, he created many strange and wonderful inventions, many of which he used in a short-lived career as a two-fisted adventurer in the late 1930's. Even the limited fame this brought him was too much for him; although he cared passionately about humanity in the abstract, the Duke had no particular liking for individual specimens of the species. Towards the end of his life, in 1976, he perfected a means of limited time travel, which worked only for inanimate objects. Although briefly stymied by this apparent blind alley, he eventually hit upon the plan of sending back all of his journals, notes, and theories. Everything he'd discovered, and everything he'd theorized but not had the time to investigate fully, he sent back to his younger self.

Second Incarnation

The books he sent arrived on his younger self's bedside table one February morning in 1926. At first, the arrival of the book puzzled the younger Brunswick. But it contained secrets that only he knew, and some predictions of the (to him) near future that soon came to pass, assuring Brunswick of the book's veracity. He set to his work with a will, able to advance upon discoveries he had already made; thus the cycle began.

Third Incarnation

The massive confusion that was experienced by the third incarnation of Duke Brunswick was largely a result of a simple but frustrating error on the part of his predecessor. On February 17, 1926, he received both sets of books -- those of both of his predecessors. It took him over a year to work out what had happened, by which time he had become sufficiently frustrated that he had no intention of going through the same privations as his two predecessors.

In 1956, he was diagnosed with acute liver failure, brought on by several years of wine, women, and song. This diagnosis was a wake-up call to Brunswick. Repenting his dissolute ways, he spent his few remaining weeks building at least the time machine, and sending back the books to his successor. But in order to avoid the problems he had

faced, he was careful to send back his books to the day after the first set, beginning a tradition that all his successors would follow.

Fourth Incarnation

After the warnings of his predecessor, the fourth incarnation of Duke Brunswick was as moral and upright as the day is long. He was the first incarnation (not counting the original) to begin adventuring. He achieved a modest amount of fame as a two-fisted Gadgeteer and crimefighter during the 1930's, but gave it up when age started to catch up with him. This particular activity was frequently pursued by his later incarnations, also. However, as incarnations went by, more and more often his successors would carefully pick and choose only those missions that they believed were essential -- others were either ignored as insufficiently important or carried out by others alerted by the Duke, either directly or by anonymous tip.

Fifth Incarnation

By this time, the collection of journals, notebooks and the like was becoming unmanageable. In his fifth incarnation, the Duke set about organizing them all into one coherent source, editing and removing repetitions. He also took care to create a reasonably easy structure to extend on, so that his successors would have an easier time of adding to his book. This was the first time that the Manual for Life actually took on that form, although the numbering of its editions includes the earlier versions. He also began the practice of constructing the time machine sooner rather than later, so as to guard against narrow squeaks such as that experienced by the third incarnation.

Sixth Incarnation

The sixth incarnation returned to science with a vengeance, and made more advances than any of his other incarnations. He even flirted (briefly) with biology towards the end of his life, but while he made several minor contributions to the Human Genome Project, he made insufficient real progress in the subject in terms of discoveries or inventions to encourage any of his following incarnations to pursue this study.

Seventh Incarnation

The seventh incarnation of Duke Brunswick spent years rehabilitating the work and reputation of Nicholas Tesla, with impressive results. The combined genius of the two of them (and the Duke's independent wealth) was sufficient to develop and build broadcast power for the entire world in 1935, and awesome weapons of destruction that were used by the United States after the Japanese attacks of 1937 to end the Pacific War swiftly and decisively. After the war, the two were joined by Einstein, and together developed the mathematics for faster than light travel, although none of them lived to see its successful testing in 1966.

Eighth Incarnation

The eighth incarnation of the Duke followed up on the work his predecessor had done with Einstein and Tesla, although his focus was more on particle physics than on quantum physics. In 1958 this Duke disappeared when a miniaturization experiment went wrong, and he became lost in sub-atomic worlds.

Ninth Incarnation

After ensuring the safe transmission of the Manual, this incarnation of the Duke experimented with having himself cryogenically frozen upon death, and in this manner, traveled to the very far future. 10,000 years or more in the future, he was revived, and lived for another 200 years, inventing up a storm. But interdictions on time travel prevented him from sending any of these later developments back, and thus his successors have assumed that the cryogenic suspension was unsuccessful, and have not have themselves suspended.

Tenth Incarnation

Reading the journals left by his predecessors left this incarnation with the conviction that his life was empty and meaningless. Although it was full of achievements as an inventor and crime-fighter, the largely solitary nature of the Duke's prior incarnations left a sensation of hollowness in the heart of the tenth. He determined not to fall into the same trap, and sought to know other people better. In 1942, he married Betty Sue Jansen, who had been his lab assistant for the previous decade. The marriage was not a happy one, but the Duke's morals would not permit him to divorce her. Their son, Nathaniel, was born in 1946, and outlived both his parents. He used his own modification of his father's time travel device to explore the future, departing in 1970 for the centuries ahead. Nathaniel never returned.

Eleventh Incarnation

Largely as a result of the warnings of his predecessor, this incarnation of the Duke did not get married, and was, if anything, the most solitary and bookish of all Brunswick's incarnations. He did spend a lot of time pondering might-have-beens, and his work alone constitutes at least half of the Manual for Life's total content regarding temporal physics and related matters.

Twelfth Incarnation

The twelfth incarnation of Duke Brunswick put his immediate predecessor's work to good use. He built himself a time machine that would work for living beings as well as inorganic matter, and spent most of his long career exploring the time-stream -- and the alternate timelines that the Duke's own existence had generated. Most of this activity was motivated by the desire to search for Nathaniel, although Brunswick always claimed that he sought only to expand the frontiers of knowledge. He never succeeded in finding Nathaniel, and eventually concluded that his son's very existence had been erased by some fluke of temporal physics he did not yet understand.

Thirteenth Incarnation

In 1943, the thirteenth incarnation was conscripted to fight in World War Two, and joined the US Air Force. Using the last of his leave to finish his work, he prepared all of his journals and papers, and left instructions in his will to make sure that they would be sent back even if he was not able to send them himself.

Fortunately, his preparations turned out to be unnecessary, although he was shot down on one mission and spent several months in a German prisoner of war camp. After the war, he assisted the State Department in bringing several top German scientists to the United States.

Fourteenth Incarnation

Determined to avoid the errors of his immediately previous incarnation, this incarnation of the Duke joined the Marines instead. Tragically, he was killed at Omaha Beach on D-Day. Fortunately, he had made sure to include the same provisions in his will that his predecessor had, and the progression continued.

Fifteenth Incarnation

Starting with this incarnation, the Duke would release some of his inventions to the public, and thus come into moderate wealth. He used this wealth mostly to further his career as an inventor, but also to buy his way out of military service. (Although he was tangentially involved in the Manhattan Project.) He rationalized that he worth as a scientist was greater than his worth as a soldier, and he seems to have been right about this.

Sixteenth Incarnation

The actions of his previous incarnation worried the Duke a great deal, and although he continued his scientific work,

Brunswick became more and more interested in the search for truth. He studied journalism, and became a reporter in 1932. From this position, he chronicled his age, restlessly searching for the true nature of all things. During World War Two he served as writer and narrator of newsreels when in America -- but he vastly preferred working on the front. His 1944 interview with Erwin Rommel, which led to Rommel's defection to the Allied side, is widely regarded as his greatest achievement. After the war ended later that year, the Duke came home, and started to write as a columnist for several syndicated newspapers. As the years progressed, he continued his quest for truth, but increasingly as a philosopher rather than a reporter.

Seventeenth Incarnation

The seventeenth incarnation of Duke Brunswick is the oddest one of the bunch. He reversed the trend of many of his predecessors. Not only did he fight crime during the pulp era, but he joined the French Foreign Legion in 1938 in order to be able to join the war against Hitler that much sooner. He eventually rose to the rank of Captain, and was decorated as a hero of the French Republic after the war's end.

In the fifties, he returned to science, and worked with the United States Air Force as part of Project Blue Book. Later, he was employed by NASA. His meteoric rise to fame and fortune coincided with the accidental death of Chuck Yeager in 1957. By 1966, Duke Brunswick was the head of NASA, and it was largely thanks to him that the Moon was permanently settled by the USA in 1974. Upon his death in 1980, President Nixon had a statue to him erected at Tycho Centre (on the Moon), and declared that the first Mars base would be named after him.

Eighteenth Incarnation

The eighteenth incarnation of the Duke was invited to speak at a symposium in Berlin in 1934. Ordinarily, he would have refused, but his predecessor's accounts intrigued him, and he wanted to see Nazi Germany for himself. While there, he met Adolf Hitler, and was much impressed with the man. He became a supporter of the Nazi regime, and spend much of the War years working as a saboteur on the homefront. In 1944, he was arrested for his crimes, but escaped custody and fled to Argentina. By the time of his death, in 1978, he was speculated to be responsible, directly or indirectly, for the escape of over a hundred high-ranking Nazis and thousands of deaths. Fortunately, after transmitting the Manual for Life on to his next incarnation, he was executed by his fellows, who suspected him of treachery. His lab was destroyed and his notes thus prevented from falling into Nazi hands.

Nineteenth Incarnation

Upon reading his predecessor's journals, this incarnation of Brunswick was consumed by guilt. He had a mental breakdown and spent five years an institution. When he was released, in 1932, he emigrated to Europe, where he worked tirelessly to oppose the rise of Adolf Hitler. Thanks largely to his efforts, and those of others he had inspired by his work as both activist and propagandist, Britain and France refused to permit the partition of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Hitler's abortive invasion of Denmark in 1939 was cut short by a British counter-attack, combined with a French strike across the Rhine. Hitler himself was shot while trying to flee Berlin. The Duke then turned his efforts to promoting the idea of a Jewish state in Palestine, but was murdered by one of the surviving SS members in 1944. The nation of Israel was founded the following year.

Twentieth Incarnation

Having decided to avoid the extremes of his two immediate predecessors, this incarnation instead devoted himself to practical engineering. His work with R. Buckminster Fuller brought him to national acclaim, particularly after the spectacular success of their dymaxion automobile. In 1952, he married Marilyn Monroe, but the marriage was not a happy one. Despite the frequent rumors of Monroe behaving adulterously, he refused to divorce her. In 1963, a stray shot from the gun of an assassin caused President Kennedy's automobile to explode, killing all within. Brunswick felt responsible (the automobile had been one his designs, and an ordinary internal combustion engine would not have exploded), and Monroe committed suicide out of grief early the following year. Her husband survived to see Aldrin and Miller land on the Moon in 1968, but died from cancer in 1972.

Twenty-First Incarnation

Of all the Duke's incarnations, none were so eager to avoid the limelight as the twenty-first. In 1928, he faked his death and went into hiding on a privately owned island in the Bahamas. From that time, until his actual demise in 1983, he worked on whatever took his fancy. His concern for his security led him to make great advances in robotics and stealth technologies, and by 1947, he was flying in a saucer-shaped craft of his own design that was immune to nearly all forms of detection, including the naked eye, while in stealth mode. Occasional malfunctions led to a few sightings of this craft, but it was never conclusively identified.

Twenty-Second Incarnation

Reacting against the paranoia of his predecessor, the Duke became much more public about his advances in robotics, proving his point dramatically when the wholly automated Enola Gay dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. The Duke was briefly a war hero and celebrity until he was targeted by McCarthy as a "pre-mature anti-fascist" in 1951, and dropped out of the public eye. His work on robotics and cybernetics continued, and by the late seventies, the first cyberware was patented by him. Using his own products, the Duke lived on until 2049, when he was struck by lightning in a freak storm.

Twenty-Third Incarnation

Far and away the oddest incarnation of the Duke, the twenty-third incarnation became fascinated by the shadow play of politics and conspiracy, and devoted his life to rooting it out wherever possible -- utilizing the two-fisted style and marvelous technology of his many antecedents. He had a few early triumphs, most notably the exposure of the corporate conspiracy behind the criminalization of marijuana in 1937. But his true triumph came years later when he exposed several Nazi war criminals who had been given name identities and put to work by a variety of Allied governments. His last well-known exploit was in 1976, when he exposed the CIA's involvement in the fall of the US-allied Australian government the year before. In 1979, he disappeared -- and it was at that time that he sent his Manual back. Rumors surfaced over the years that he had joined some underground Discordian movement, and claims were made that he had been sighted at Live Aid in 1985, and at the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The truth remains unclear.

Twenty-Fourth Incarnation

The current incarnation of the Duke is perhaps the most cunning of all of them. But then, circumstances have forced him to be; the Manual For Life has been stolen from him, and he is marshaling all the resources he has available to him. These include robotic agents that search for the book, as well as a well-funded group of private investigators.

Using Duke Brunswick in the Campaign

The Duke already has several plots associated with him; the search for the missing Manual for Life, 23rd Edition is simply the most obvious. Players could enter that plot in any number of ways, the most obvious being that they could be the investigators hired by Brunswick to retrieve the book. But they could just as easily be the Duke's enemies, or simply his rivals. There's no reason why they couldn't be operatives of the Illuminati, sent to find and either bring back or destroy what has been stolen from Warehouse 23.

In addition, there are several other ways the Duke could turn up; the ninth incarnation could well be revived from his cryogenic suspension in any science fiction game (like a particularly unusual *GURPS Traveller* game, for example), and the eighth could turn up just about anywhere upon his return from the sub-atomic realms. The twelfth incarnation of the Duke could arrive on this timeline at any point, as could his son, Nathaniel. And the twenty-third incarnation could be literally anywhere, doing just about anything, so long as it somehow makes sense to him and his Discordian buddies.

The Duke's reclusive nature and arrogance make him as easy to use as an Enemy for the players as he would be an Ally or Patron -- and it would be child's play to keep them guessing. Even the two-fisted, pulp action style incarnations could be made villainous, depending on how ruthless he was in pursuing his experiments -- or in meting out justice.

Farther out, the Duke could fit easily into any *GURPS Cliffhangers* or *GURPS Atomic Horror* game -- and there's no way for the players to know which incarnation of him you're using until it's too late for the knowledge to help them. And as a man who generates a large number of alternate timelines, he could easily be investigated by either Homeline or Centrum; indeed, Homeline could easily be almost any of his timelines. A *GURPS Alternate Earths* campaign could become very strange indeed if the Duke is around to create new timelines every so often. And the Duke himself would fit right in on Gernsback (*GURPS Alternate Earths*, page 107. The Duke would most likely be a high-ranking member of the World Science Council -- or someone dismissed as a crank even by the open-minded scientists of Gernsback.) And a man knowing as much as the Duke does about things he shouldn't could easily wind up on Coventry (TT105) or in the Village (in a *GURPS Prisoner* game). Keeping him there would be another thing entirely.

At the furthest removes, the Duke could be a mage rather than a scientist -- in which case the Manual itself is more like a grimoire. As such, he would work well in *GURPS Fantasy* or *GURPS Technomancer* -- and even better in *GURPS Mage: The Ascension*. A darker version of him could easily be put into a *GURPS Horror* or *GURPS Voodoo* game -- what if the time travel incantations needed human sacrifices to work?

On the Nature of Time

The many lives of Duke Brunswick are based on the assumption that time is Chaotic on a personal level, but Plastic with High Resistance on a larger scale. That is to say, although individuals' lives can alter easily, larger historical changes are much more difficult -- and take longer to achieve (in terms of elapsed time).

Thus, the Duke's lives vary greatly from incarnation to incarnation -- but only a minority of them have effects that greatly alter the broad shape of history. The history of the most recent incarnation is that of today's world, or of your campaign world. Although the Duke certainly has the knowledge to greatly alter history, he rarely seems to act on it. It is an open question whether the history of the world in his original incarnation is the one we know or not -- the Duke didn't pay much attention to large scale historical events until his thirteenth incarnation was conscripted. It's quite possible that he merely got so engrossed in his studies that he didn't notice World War Two (the Duke was something of a fanatic). But it's equally possible that it simply didn't happen in the histories of any of his previous incarnations.

* * *

(*Author's Note:* Like its companion article, "The Manual for Life: 23rd Edition," this article was inspired by R.A. Lafferty's brilliant short story "Rainbird" (unfortunately *still* out of print), and to a lesser extent by another short story, Robert Heinlein's classic "By His Bootstraps.")

The 30-Seconders: A GURPS Ogre Campaign

by Kurt Brown

"If we win, nobody will care. If we lose, there will BE nobody to care."
Winston Churchill before a secret session of the House of Commons, June 25, 1941

It is 2079, and the Final War has became a war of attrition a meat-grinder that military historians have likened to World War I on a global scale. Paneuropean forces in the Sahara Combat Zone face continuous probes from Combine conventional forces and Ogres based out of Morocco. With the Combine breakout from Spain and into the plains of France, Paneurope Defense Command has shifted their full attention to the European Theater.

Elements of the Second Army based in Egypt have been informed that they can expect little support from home for the foreseeable future. DefComm has decreed that the Second Army should conduct a campaign of harassment and delay against Combine forces in the SCZ until such time as reinforcements can be spared or transport arranged to withdraw the divisions of the Second Army to mainland Europe. It is up to the fast-moving units of the Second Army's Fast Attack Cavalry to seek out and destroy Combine supply depots, command posts, light armored columns, and other support facilities. It is hoped that these raids will distract and delay Combine forces long enough to allow the heavier elements of the army to make preparations to stand and fight in Libya and western Egypt.

The results of this campaign could determine the outcome of the War. If the Combine is allowed to gain control of North Africa along with their current positions in Europe, the Federation will face entrenched enemies on two of her three flanks. The forces of the Second Army must prevent this at all cost.

A Brief History of the 30-Seconders

The Fast Attack Cavalry of the Second Army's North Africa Corps consists almost exclusively of GEV units. The rolling, sandy terrain of the Sahara Combat Zone is the most inviting and accessible terrain short of flat, calm lakes that GEV pilots could hope for. Given the large stretches of open countryside, the speed of the GEVs make them the best suited fighting vehicle for the region since Camels were tamed by Bedouin raiders.

Whereas GEV pilots in other theaters have to maneuver their craft among trees and buildings, FAC pilots routinely maintained 200+ kph speeds for hours at a time while on patrol without having to make more than minor course corrections. The wide open Sahara is a magnet for the speed-demons of the Federation military, and hotshot pilots from other units constantly seek transfer to North Africa. This makes the Second Army FAC one of the best (and most incorrigible) units in the Federation Army.

Before the invasion of Morocco and the Ivory Coast by Combine forces in 2074-2075, the FAC saw few pitched battles. Detractors of the highly individualistic and (to outside observers) pampered unit considered North Africa a cushy assignment for speed freaks and troublemakers. "Drag races" were common, and the officers of the FAC turned a blind eye to most of their men's excesses as they too had been known to "blow dust" on occasion.

As Combine forces began to move out of their beachheads in September 2074, the FAC units were the first to engage the enemy in large-scale fighting. The open terrain that promoted racing and fancy maneuvers also gave exceptional visibility, allowing the heavier Combine forces to score long-range kills against the lightly armored GEVs. The skills of the FAC pilots were put to the test as the speed and maneuverability of their craft were the only thing that prevented them from joining the thousands of others who lost their lives in North Africa, from Roman legionnaires to German tankers.

During the first six months of the ground war in Africa, FAC forces suffered devastating losses. In the battle of Ghadamis on the Algeria-Libyan border, the FAC units involved suffered losses of almost 60%. Fortunately, the heavy armor of the Second Army was successful in stalling the Combine offensive and the FAC units wee pulled back for refit and reorganization. The days of carefree racing were over.

As new equipment and personnel pour in to Egypt, the veterans of the running battles in Algeria have devised new tactics and training routines for the fresh arrivals. The enthusiasm of the pilots disembarking in Cairo is palpable. They are joining the famous Second Army FAC, the best of the best, and are eager to show they have the right stuff. As they settle in to their training rooms, their instructors face them with grim faces and welcome them to the 30-Seconders. Inevitably, one of the new arrivals asks what the term means:

"The average life expectancy of a GEV pilot engaged in combat in the Sahara Combat Zone is 30 seconds. Now, if you turn to page 4 of your briefing manual . . ."

Welcome to North Africa

GURPS Ogre presents the GMs and players with a high-powered setting for roleplaying, and also presents a new set of challenges to the GM. In a world where nuclear weapons are a way of life, typical adventuring styles meet with little success. Ogre is a militaristic world that calls for aggressive, combat-oriented play. The Second Army FAC "30-Seconders" provides the GM and players with a small, cohesive unit that operates independently from the normal channels of military command. This gives them the flexibility needed for individual roleplaying while providing a solid foundation for the GM to build on.

The players should create characters around the GEV-Jockey Template found on pg. 40 of ***GURPS: Ogre***. Additionally, they should take the Non-Com or Officer Lenses detailed on pg. 47. This will yield a "new arrival" character for the FAC of between 80-100 points. If the players wish to be veterans of the Sahara Combat Zone, the GM should allow an additional 25-50 points to create more experienced pilots and gunners for the FAC GEVs.

The 30-Seconders use the Paneuropean "Galahad" GEV detailed on pgs. 69-70 of ***GURPS Ogre***, while the more insane members of the unit fly the one-man "Cossack" Light GEV found on pgs. 70-71. Since the heavier Galahad is a two-man craft (driver/gunner) the PCs can either team up with other PCs, or take one position and leave the other to be filled by an NPC.

FAC units range in size from two-vehicle elements up to 20 or more craft operating together. To date, the hit and run raids punctuated by carefully chosen larger engagements have proven effective at limiting the advance of Combine forces in the SCZ. In addition to these harassing raids, the 30-Seconders scout for the heavier elements of the Second Army, coordinate attacks on fortified enemy positions and force concentrations, transport special forces teams deep behind enemy lines, and other missions that call for speed and stealth.

Mahewy's "Master Ninjas": A sample FAC Unit

Originally part of the 43rd GEV FAC based out of Al-Quatrun in southern Libya, Captain Loraine Mahewy's "Master Ninjas" were established as an independent unit after the 43rd suffered heavy losses to Combine forces in the natural gas fields near Edjeleh, Algeria in late 2074. The Ninjas currently consist of five Galahad GEVs crewed mostly by veterans of the last two years of fighting. The fact that they have survived as long as they have as a cohesive unit is a minor miracle and indicates that they are among the elite, capable of defeating almost any unit from any army in the world.

Since early 2075 the Ninjas have conducted numerous hit and run raids across the Algerian border from their nominal base in Libya, including the spectacularly successful strike against the Combine Forward Rearmament Facility at Mizi, just north of the Tasili mountains. As a result of the raid at Mizi, the Ninjas have earned a price on their head from Combine African Command. The Ninjas take this as a point of pride and are more than happy to remind their fellow FAC units of the fact.

The Ninja's GEVs are in remarkably good shape considering the amount of action they have seen, but obtaining ammunition and replacement parts is becoming more difficult as supplies are diverted to the battlefields of Europe. Captain Mahewy maintains good relations with the commander of the 14th Supply Detachment at Benghazi on the Libyan coast, but the distance to the forward supply depot still poses problems. Unless a more readily accessible supply of parts and ammunition can be located, the Ninja's operational readiness will be severely limited.

The Ninja's GEVs are painted in intricate desert camouflage patterns, and each includes the unit's insignia on the right side beneath the pilot's cockpit: a hamster dressed in ninja garb and wielding nunchaku. Members of the unit wear black bandannas in addition to their standard desert BDU uniforms and carry throwing stars, although few know how to use them to any great effect.

Paneuropean Second Army Fast Attack Cavalry Unit 23: "Master Ninjas"

GEV Alpha: "Tigger"

- Capt. Loraine Mahewy Pilot
- Sgt. Sterum Hitzges Gunner

GEV Beta: "Filcher"

- Sgt. Toby Demming Pilot

Cpl. Novika Stalnykov Gunner

GEV Gamma: "Harpax"

- Sgt. Antonio Mivelli Pilot
- Cpl. Winston Taggart Gunner

GEV Delta: "Silky"

- Sgt. Deandra McDonnegal Pilot
- Cpl. Tanya Bergeron Gunner

GEV Epsilon: "Sapper"

- Sgt. Valislav Wachowski Pilot
- Cpl. Omar Ibn-Jabbar Gunner

Adventure Seeds

Delivering the Groceries

The PCs are assigned to escorting a Napoleon GEV Personnel Carrier and its passengers to a location 30 miles into Combine-controlled territory. Once there, they are to stand guard over the Napoleon as the infantry (nine men in oddly colored heavy battlesuits) conduct their operation. Unknown to the PCs, the battlesuited men are special forces personnel attempting to extract a double agent from a nearby Combine intelligence-gathering outpost. Once the troopers grab the agent it is almost certain that Combine units will scramble to intercept the FAC units.

Unexpected Guests

The PCs FAC is assigned to patrol deep into enemy territory seeking lightly defended supply or command and control targets. Intelligence reports indicate that one of the Combine forward command posts in the PCs area of operation may be receiving a visit from a high-ranking Combine officer. Although such a visit would include a heavy escort, a target like this doesn't come along every day.

The Hunters

Combine forces are conducting a reconnaissance in force in the PCs area of operations. Several heavy tanks, GEVs and other assorted unites are moving into an area of dry streambeds and dunes that will make their passage difficult at best. The PCs are to conduct harassment raids against the heavy tanks while attempting to avoid the GEVs. The Combine is hurting for reinforcements just as badly as the Federation, and any losses that can be inflicted will help the overall situation in the SCZ.

Sitting Ducks

The PCs are the recipients of an almost unbelievable stroke of luck a nearby reconnaissance drone unit reports a lightly defended Combine supply column has been stopped at a recently washed out bridge over a steep canyon approximately 75 km north of the PCs position. A lightning raid should catch the vehicles disorganized and in the process of reversing direction a perfect opportunity to possibly capture some much needed ammunition and other supplies as well as striking a blow against the Combine forces in this area.

Strange Bedfellows

While on a patrol across enemy lines, the PCs are directed to a nearby village where drones report the presence of a Mk I Ogre. According to the imagery received by the Drone, the Ogre is sitting in the middle of the small village and appears to have children playing on it. It seems to be intact and undamaged, and fired on the drones as they approached for a closer look. This highly unusual situation must be investigated as an Ogre in this area (even a Mk I) could prove to be very dangerous to Federation plans. The PCs are advised to try to limit civilian casualties if at all possible.

by Owen S. Kerr

Art by Pat Morrissey

Religion, historically, has been perhaps the single most important aspect of human society. Expressions of faith, from beautiful works of art to declarations of war in God's name, have shaped and shaken the world, and continue to do so. In a roleplaying game, a game that attempts in some way to mimic life (or, at least, some aspects of it), religion and faith should be a dynamic and vital part of game-world life . . . as much if not more so than bigger weapons, tougher armor, and more hit points.

Religion is not always given nearly enough emphasis in many roleplaying games. This is not to say that there aren't any gods. In the High Fantasy genre, the gods are a very real and meaningful presence in the world. Priests of every stripe bop around, curing the sick and the lame or, conversely, carving up virgins in the name of the Dark One, and everyone else just goes about their business. Fantasy religion is certainly run like a business worshipping a god or gods isn't seen as a issue of faith as much as a matter of common sense. When the great God X will heal your sick child upon request, and the terrible God Y can level your village if he gets upset, it's only rational to fervently pray to the one and to energetically appease the other. Faith isn't an issue, since (to paraphrase Terry Pratchett) the gods have a habit of popping by an atheist's house to throw rocks through his windows.

The Gods Above And Below

In stock Fantasy, the commonplace occurrences of miraculous healing, water walking, and transmutation of clean water into a nice dry mead make the First Big Question moot: "Does God (do the gods) exist?" Not only is there proof of the gods' existence, re-affirmations happen every day, in the form of one miracle or another. The spellcasting ability of your average low-level priest would qualify him as a genuine Coming of the Messiah in the real world; not so in High Fantasy. Some fantasy priests also speak with their gods on a regular and informal basis, and can, with your small donation to the cause (read: large donation to the priesthood), pass on any pertinent information to the public at large.

The result of this extended three-way conversation answers Big Question Two: "What does God (do the gods) want Iosef Average to do to make him (them) happy?" Big Question Three -- "What happens after I die?" -- is also wrapped up nicely when your deity hangs out at the local pub, swapping stories about the joys of the afterlife for the odd drink. In a typical gaming world, High Fantasy societies have no need for faith in gods, since they have incontrovertible proof. Believing in the gods would be like believing in the tax collector. The common herd may not know the reasoning behind the wishes of the gods, but they know what the Divine Ones want; that's enough for most folks.

On a related note, in many of the urban horror and urban fantasy games, religion and faith are just different powers that the characters can enjoy. "Your Maltorforatu charms have no effect on me, Von Trapp! I am protected from your diabolical powers by my faith in God! True Faith 1.2™! Now with DarkBlok™, benchmarked at twice the sanctity of the industry standard belief system! And beware of Children's True Faith™, now in chewable tablets! In orange, grape, and new root beer flavor!" The problem here is the characters have more faith in their abilities, powers that (theoretically) come from God, than they do in God Himself. In a modern setting, the omniscient, omnipotent, omni-benevolent Deity rarely makes a personal appearance (even *In Nomine*, a game with angels and demons as PCs, has a God that stays backstage), though He makes His presence known second-hand. There is also the operant conditions of the game world to consider: if witches, ghouls, vampires, werewolves, and Things That Go Rend In The Night are all real and tangible, there's a better than even chance that the Good Guys are real, too. The strong implications of God's existence short-circuit the usual soul-searching and crises of faith that arise in everyday Real Life. Religion is only important to players who gain abilities by abusing the system.

Many of the more mainstream science fiction and science fantasy games, on the other hand, rarely even touch on the topic of religion, at least in a positive manner. (*The Parable of the Sower*, by Octavia Butler, is a notable exception.) Religious plot hooks in sci-fi consistently involve the laughable beliefs of a backward culture that wants to:

a. Sacrifice the Away Team to their primitive god,
b. worship the party's robots as demigods, or
c. subject a main character to the painful rituals of their bizarre faith.

Another standard of the genre is the society that has embraced pacifism as a way of life, and needs the PCs to fight off an otherwise-unstoppable menace. "Religion? Hokey, outdated, and no substitute for a good gauss pistol at your hip. Faith? Only for the weak and superstitious. We're beyond the stage where we need to embrace those irrational convictions, bucko! We have Science, instead!" An area where sci-fi and modern fantasy overlap is found in the *Star Wars Roleplaying Game*: the Force. The Force is there whether you believe in it or not, and if you can train your mind, it is, as they say, a powerful ally. This is another "believe and ye shall receive" game mechanic, but at least it fits the background of the system. What makes the Force different from your typical god is that it doesn't require worship, just a firm belief in oneself. Not that this makes the situation any better for our purposes, but the mood and structure of *Star Wars* would suffer greatly if this mechanic was modified or dropped.

With as bad a rap that religion gets in starship science fiction, the belief systems of the cyberpunk sub-genre are even sketchier. Not only has everyone in post-modern society lost faith in the divine, they don't put a lot of trust in science, either. This worldview is not only dystopian; it's unrealistic. It is disingenuous to think that advancing technology will have a negative effect on the prevailing religious beliefs of the day. In fact, history shows the opposite to be the case. Technological advances before and during the Renaissance and Industrial Age seemed to spark a renewed focus on the spiritual aspects of life. True, an age of high technology, with cultural elements as diverse as cybernetics and starflight, will certainly see some people losing interest in spiritual matters. A percentage the society will feel that science has answered all the Big Questions, and will stop asking. Others, deeply touched by the wonders of the universe, become much more firm and fervent in their devotional beliefs. Any tech advances that increase a society's leisure time will also act to heighten awareness and appreciation of matters of the spirit. In many cases, the new information available to the masses causes a reactionary movement back to more traditional values.

We've looked at the problems that plague religions in RPGs. Game religion doesn't have the massive social impact that it does in the real world. Fantasy societies can shop for gods as if they're buying new rugs for the foyer, and science fiction societies seem to have moved beyond the need for gods. What's left is to talk about methods to change the situation for the better. Ask yourself a few pertinent questions.

First of all, for Game Masters: Will your game benefit from adding a more realistic approach to religion? If you're running a *Paranoia* or *Toon* campaign, chances are good that the answer is no. Be aware that religion adds a great deal of complexity to a campaign, and some games are more than complex enough. Other campaigns demand a good hard look at the beliefs and belief structures of the societies involved. If you're running a campaign based in Renaissance Italy, full of cloaks, daggers, art, intrigue, poison, and court politics, religion had better be a part of the mix. If it isn't, don't throw yourself in the Grand Canal; write out a few lines on the prevailing religious beliefs, their main proponents,

any current variations on the major themes (Protestant vs. Catholic Christianity, Shiite vs. Sunni, Orthodox vs. Reformed, etc.), and any prominent heresies. (In many cases, "variation" equals "heresy," FYI.) Religious intrigue can be just as vicious as any other breed . . . perhaps more so. If you're not playing the type of game that calls for this type of thing, and would like to, take a look at *7th Sea*.

The next questions you must answer are those of location and scope. In the setting of the game, who believes in what, and how many adherents are there for this particular belief? What percentage of the population believes this way? How many major religions are there in the area? How many minor ones? Is there a state religion? How devout is the man on the street? How do the True Believers treat those that believe differently? Are there restrictions placed on the clergy or the general population? What are these restrictions and why do they exist? (Jewish dietary laws make a lot of sense, if you know anything about the cooking practices of the tribes of the Middle East in the BC's. Shellfish, for instance, is prohibited. Seems whimsical, until you learn about the bacteria that exists in Mediterranean shellfish that, if the critter is improperly cooked, can kill you!) Be arbitrary if you wish, but do try to come up with plausible excuses for any wacky "shalts and shalt nots" that you want to spring on the true believers in your game world.

Players: Talk to your GM about the religions in the gaming neighborhood. Odds are your character has been raised within one particular belief system, and will subscribe to one or more of these religions. Choose a religion that's consistent with the way you want to play your PC, and run with it. Think for a moment or two about your character's beliefs. Did his family or family-equivalent have a particular religion? Does the religion discriminate along racial, gender, or social lines? Does the character follow the strictest dogma of the faith? To what tenets of the religion does your character subscribe? Which does he reject or have issue with? Does your character tithe or otherwise financially support the religion? How devout is the character? Why? If your GM hasn't put a great deal of thought into the religious structures of the campaign, help out! Share your thoughts with the other players in your group. Any insight into a character's background and upbringing could be a key in playing that character.

Religious Plot Seeds

The Archpriest

The new High Priest speaks out against the atrocities that the local government has done in order to ferret out a group of rebels or dissidents. The rhetoric of the High Priest galvanizes the other nations in the region, as followers of the same religion demand that something be done. PCs may be assassins hired to kill him in the classic "make it look like an accident" style, devout locals sworn to protect the priest at all costs, or rebel guerrillas trying to ambush government soldiers.

All's Fair in Love and Jihad

The PC's hometown is wracked with civil unrest. The two major religions of the area have come into heated conflict in the city, and revolt and civil war seems immanent. The party may be part of the problem or a means to a solution: the group is either split along religious lines, or is called by moderates from both factions to mediate the dispute. If you're feeling particularly evil, make it both! Make sure to note those townsfolk that won't deal with members of the opposing religion, particularly those that can make life rough on the party: government officials, police, soldiers, doctors, etc.

Jerusalem, Beirut, And Everything After . . .

More a setting than a seed, this city bears the marks of countless years of war. Two (or more) religious factions claim this place as a holy city, and have been attempting to drive all other factions from it. Sporadic street clashes, snipers, terrorist actions, and one broken armistice after another are all too common. PCs may be followers of a particular sect with big plans to win the war, cooler heads trying to find a common ground, or freebooters that take advantage of the high level of conflict in the city to make their fortunes. Holy men, arms dealers, relic merchants, and garden-variety criminals abound.

Sample Fantasy Deity

Morattar
Death God

Symbol: Azure, a sword inverted Sable, on a sunburst Or, bordure Argent. (For the heraldry-challenged: a black two-handed sword point-down in a silver doorway, a gold sunburst behind, with a blue sky.) Priests wear either the Sword (black on gold) or the Doorway (silver on blue), depending on their specialties. High Priests wear both. The Patriarch wears just the Sunburst.

Interests: Death, birth, healing, protection, and peaceful negotiations.

Morattar is the god of timely death. He knows when every mortal in his ken is to die of natural causes, and works through his clergy to ensure that their death comes at the appropriate time. He is the god of the painless and fearless passage to the afterlife. The majority of his priests are called Sentinels, guardians of the passage to the other side. They have sworn to Morattar their service and their lives, and pledge to keep their congregation from harm and want until their natural time of death. The type of death that Morattar smiles upon involves being surrounded by family and friends, at a great age, quietly, in bed. He thinks of disease and injury as agents that unnaturally hasten a mortal's death, and his priests are well trained in the healing arts. He counts many midwives among his followers. No Sentinel may refuse to succor anyone who asks the priest for aid. The Sentinels of Morattar are forbidden to take a mortal's life, unless their time has come. In these cases, they are to make the person's passing as easy and painless as possible (many initiates have a better-than-average knowledge of fast-acting poisons). The feudal lords in an area blessed by Morattar often call upon the Sentinels to mediate disputes that would otherwise lead to armed conflict, as war and its attendant plagues are anathema to the god. Sentinels are known as gifted diplomats and keen bargainers, and well they should be; their auditor is a Lord higher than any mortal monarch.

Morattar's priests are not spineless pacifists -- far from it. They are also charged by their god to protect life unto its natural end. To this point, some priests of Morattar, the Swords, are trained extensively in skill at arms. They use their skills to protect the weak and downtrodden from tyrants and other oppressors. Evil people cause pain and suffering to their fellow mortals, and this can bring a premature end to any number of lives. Swords of Morattar investigate any rumors of harsh governance and bring grievances to the attention of the accused. If an evil or cruel individual mends his ways immediately, nothing more is said or done. If not, Morattar feels that one untimely death, if it will prevent many more from occurring, is a decent bargain to make. Transgressors get only one chance. Swords are sworn to bring wrongdoers to justice, and to act as executioner to the unrepentant wicked.

The afterlife brings mortals to their final reward, and souls of the departed are to remain inviolate. Undead are the foulest abomination in the eyes of Morattar. They are to be destroyed at every opportunity.

In case it needs to be said, there is no resurrection. Ever. Well, hardly ever; the rule has few exceptions, unless the departed soul 1) was killed before its time and 2) can present a compelling argument as to why it should return. Historically, this has only happened on three occasions. Reincarnation is a different story, but is only allowed at the proper time; generally fifty to one hundred years after the death of any given individual.

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Pyramid Review

Galaxy: The Dark Ages

Published by GMT Games

Created by Don Greenwood and Reiner Knizia

Boxed card game with 120 cards, 25 chips, four combat dice, and a plastic draw/discard tray; $25.00

Galaxy: The Dark Ages from GMT Games is a strategy card game for two to five players that plays in just over an hour. A descendant of *Titan: The Arena*, *Galaxy* depicts a power struggle between the players for influence among the eight worlds. Designed by Reiner Knizia (*Tigris & Euphrates*, *Modern Art*) and developed by Don Greenwood (*Up Front*, *Squad Leader*), *Galaxy* shows both European and Avalon Hill influences and makes an excellent game for hobby gamers and regular folk alike.

The game starts with the eight world cards in a row, heading eight columns. Players do not play individual worlds; they are behind the scenes manipulators -- galactic illuminati, if you will. Players have five bases which they place during the game onto one world or another, representing influence in the different worlds. You can place one base per turn, and bases played earlier in the game give more influence than those placed later. Of course, since one world is eliminated in each of the five rounds, bases placed early in the game may disappear with their world. Bases can be "improved" or "damaged" (moving them up and down the columns and increasing or decreasing their influence and score) during play.

Each player begins with eight cards, nearly all representing ships with strengths of zero through ten belonging to the eight worlds. Each turn you place a ship in the column of its parent planet. When all columns have a ship in the current row the planet defended by the lowest strength defender is removed.

Players may place one secret base, in the first round, which sits on a face down card played in front of them. They get no influence from it during the game, but neither can it be attacked. At the end of the game it scores as the highest level of influence, if its world survives. Players can reveal it during a later turn in place of placing a base, in which case it's placed at the highest influence level.

The weaker ships, strengths 0-5, all have special effects when placed: allowing you to improve one of your bases or damage someone else's, pick up an extra card, see some of another player's hand, or put someone else's cards in their reserve. Each of the eight worlds also has a special power that can be used by the world's governor when they place a card in that column. The governor, of course, is the person with the most visible influence in that world. There are also technology cards, which give you an extra power, such as revealing secret bases, an advantage in combat, or allowing an extra card draw. Technological advantages are fleeting, however: they disappear at the end of the round.

Play takes from an hour to an hour and a half. A couple games' worth of experience speeds things up. When faced with several problems and no good plays, the novice tends to stare at his cards, looking for an answer; but experience quickly teaches you to play a delaying move if you have one, and draw, hoping the next turn will give you better options.

The artwork is spectacular. Each class of ship, each alien race, each technology card is rendered in full color at a very high resolution. You will catch your opponents simply staring at the cards. GMT rules are usually very easy to learn from, but a few sections will have loose wording that can cause interpretation problems during the game. *Galaxy* is the opposite: the rules are very precisely worded, with procedures and options unambiguously laid out, but they are difficult to pick up on the first read through. An index or table of contents would have been a big help. It's fairly easy when explaining the game to new players to forget Spoils of War or some other important detail. Luckily, the somewhat involved turn sequence is spelled out on the back cover.

Play has several intriguing facets: as worlds disappear, the rounds move more quickly. Play is fairly constrained; your eight cards may give you only six plays, half of which are to your disadvantage. You must make the most of what you have. Player interaction is very strong; it's easy to hurt other players, and you often find yourself cooperating with another player to defend a world valuable to both of you, yet trying to smite each other on other worlds.

At ninety minutes, play is relatively short for a strategy game, and it's good and tense throughout. Barring exceptional bad luck, all players should be in the running until the last round. Since secret bases on a surviving world are worth five points, and those on an eliminated world are worth nothing, the final score may surprise everyone. One drawback to play is that as the worlds disappear, more and more cards are unplayable, until in the final round only 44% of the cards can be played. Thus just when the game gets dramatic, players have to discard and draw, each in turn, hoping to be the first to draw a playable card. If you were clever enough to save playable cards for this you can control the endgame; otherwise it can feel anticlimactic. But in all *Galaxy* is a solid game.

A few tips: the governor of the Cylor has a large advantage in card flow in the endgame -- either make yourself the governor of the Cylor or shut that world down early. The Myrmidons can force you to use your draw to pick up your reserve; don't make the governor of that world mad at you. The most powerful use of the Divergence power of playing two ships in a turn is probably ending a round early by filling the last two empty places. Saving your bases for play later in the game to improve their chances of surviving to the end may seem attractive, but you end up with bases worth one or two points instead of three or four, so get your bases down early and fight for them!

-- C. Andrew Walters

Pyramid Review

Before the Fall (for Call of Cthulhu RPG)

Published by [Chaosium Inc.](#)

Written by Ralph Dula, Michael Lay, Gary Sumpter, Gary O'Connell & Lucya Szachnowski

Cover by Tom Sullivan; Illustrated by M. Wayne Miller; Maps by Drashi Khendup

64 pages; $11.95

In 1928, the federal government of the United States, with the help of the US Navy, raided the strange town of Innsmouth in northeast Massachusetts. Home to the Human/Deep One hybrids and the supporters of the Deep One city of Y'ha-nthlei, just off the coast, Innsmouth is one of author H. P. Lovecraft's most famous creations as detailed in his story, "Shadows Over Innsmouth." Chaosium has explored both the town and events leading up to, as well as the actual raid itself, in their supplement, "Escape From Innsmouth," part of their Lovecraft Country series.

Prior to *Before The Fall*, the problem remains that Innsmouth is of limited use both before and after the events of the raid. Chaosium have promised us "Children of the Deep," a supplement dealing with the town after that the raid, but this was due to come out in 1999 and has yet to appear. For adventures before the raid, now there is *Before the Fall*, which is part of Chaosium's Fright Night series of adventures that can be played in a single night or session. *Before The Fall* contains four such adventures, all set specifically in the 1920s and in Lovecraft country -- for obvious reasons.

The book is well presented, as people have come to expect from Chaosium. Tom Sullivan's cover is an atmospheric depiction of creatures swimming off the shore from Innsmouth, and M. Wayne Miller's interior illustrations are likewise as good . . . probably better than those in *Beyond The Mountains of Madness*. Although the maps are not drawn by hand, Drashi Khendup has done a better job with these than in more recent releases from Chaosium. In particular, the center spread map of Innsmouth and its environs is very attractive. Within the book can be found eight pages of handouts, a short index (a nice touch for a book as short as this) and a one-page gazetteer of Lovecraft Country. This is very useful, as it describes each of the major locations particular to the Lovecraft Country series, and it notes which supplement in the series is relevant to that town or village.

[POSSIBLE SPOILER ALERTS]

Before The Fall opens with "Mary," by Mike Lay. An attractive woman living in Arkham hires the investigators to help locate her son whom she gave up for adoption at birth. The trail begins in Innsmouth and it quickly becomes apparent that the locals are just as interested in what they can learn and even go to some length to be helpful. Of course there is more to this than meets the eye -- literally! This should be a mystifying adventure for the players as there is no real "bad guy" involved and they should become aware that everyone except them is working to a timetable. Mostly set in Arkham, "Mary" is suitable for solo or relatively inexperienced players.

Plots within Innsmouth lie behind Ralph Dula's "Old Acquantaince," as an old friend, a guilt-ridden, battle-scarred veteran of the First World War, asks for their help. He has literally run into something strange in the nearby town of Innsmouth, and fears for his life. He has every right to do so and although the local doctor cannot save him, he does point to a pair of Innmouth's drunken ne'er-do-well hybrids as possible culprits. Are the two really responsible, or is

there something else going on here? Getting to the truth may bring the investigators to the attention of the town's leaders, possibly leading to their arrest or being run out of town and warned not to return. Their reward may be the saving of the innocent and possibly the acquisition of a Mythos tome or two.

The third adventure, Gary Sumpter's "The Innsmouth Connection," takes the investigators to the edge of Innsmouth as they are asked to check on or possibly inherit a long abandoned mansion on the coast. Reputed by locals to be haunted, there is a more mundane, though no less dangerous, explanation as to what is going on. Whilst the Mythos does appear in this adventure, it is more as an aside, and has to be found to be dealt with. One option is given to beef up the Mythos quotient in this adventure, but this would make it unnecessarily lethal, especially for more inexperienced characters.

The main problem I have with this adventure is not its single typographical error (the only one in the book), but that its plot is very similar to that of a 1981 TSR AD&D adventure, *U1: The Sinister Secret of Saltmarsh*. Even the map of the mansion bears striking resemblance to that of the house in *U1*, which happens to one of my favorite AD&D adventures and thus why I noted the similarity. It is good to see Chaosium throwing a less other-worldly threat at the investigators, but I would have liked this adventure more had I not seen the plot elsewhere.

The final adventure is "The Occulted Light," by Lucya Szachnowski and Gary O'Connell. This has similarities to the first scenario in that it also has a young woman looking for help with investigating her family background. Her attempts to do so in Innsmouth have proved fruitless and she hopes that the investigators will have more luck. She believes that she will learn more by visiting an abandoned lighthouse, where her great-grandfather worked. Getting there is not easy, as the necessary charts have to be found and a boat chartered, but getting back off proves altogether more deadly. Held prisoner by a major Mythos beastie in the waters around the rocky island, upon which the lighthouse stands, the investigators must find a way of getting rid of it. Fortunately, the means to do so, both mundane and magical, can be found on the island, but it may take an alliance with the real reason the young woman came to the island to escape.

These four adventures can stand on their own as written, because Chaosium has included just about the right amount of detail to allow successful play in the towns of Arkham and Innsmouth. But both the *Arkham Unveiled* and *Escape From Innsmouth* supplements would be useful references to the Keeper running these, as would reading Lovecraft's "Shadows Over Innsmouth." Chaosium should be applauded for not making either supplement necessary to run these adventures and I wish that more companies took the same attitude.

Barring the reservations I have about "The Innsmouth Connection," this is a goodly quartet of Cthulhu adventures. They tend towards the slight in terms of encounters with the Mythos and Innsmouth, which is as they should be, hinting at or squirting with the awfulness that lies behind the battered façade of the dreaded town, without giving too much away. Even better is that the conclusions to each of these adventures is far from cut and dried, and there may be consequences, as well as benefits from many of the actions that the players take to solve them.

[END SPOILER ALERTS]

If the Keeper has already run *Escape From Innsmouth*, then another option would be to set these adventures elsewhere where there is a Deep One city nearby, such as Ahu-Y'hloa near Cornwall and G'll-Hoo near the island of Surtesy in the North Sea. Yet *Before The Fall* is really for the Lovecraft Country series, and would be run best as part of that campaign. If the Keeper has already run *Escape From Innsmouth*, then *Before The Fall* will be of little use. But if not, then this is a good way to introduce the players to Innsmouth without exposing to the full horror, and is recommended for that.

The Stealers of Lives

by Michael Wilson

ST: 10-12
DX: 10-12
IQ: 11-13
HT: 10-12
Move/Dodge: 6/7
PD/DR: 0/0
Damage: as human; 1d-3 punch, 1d-1 kick
Reach: C, 1
Size: 1
Weight: 120-220
Habitat: urban

Hidden among the urban throngs dwell a group of creatures who live to destroy the lives of others. Called the Stealers of Lives, they hide in plain view while they methodically go about their twisted business. Each Stealer lives with a single goal in mind: to attack and subvert the network of relationships which makes up its chosen victim's life until there is nothing left. They lie in wait, they make their plans, and then they take everything away.

A Stealer's motives for selecting a target are unfathomable; the most any Stealer has been persuaded to say on the subject is, "He was ripe." Once the target is selected, however, the process follows a standard pattern. First, the Stealer spends months, or even years, watching its designated target, learning his routines, his tastes, his resources. Next, the Stealer sets up its pawns. This may mean insinuating itself into the target's circle of friends, or placing agents into his business. It arranges its considerable resources in such a fashion as to have the maximum influence possible over its target's life. Finally, the Stealer strikes.

Stealer tactics seem to change with age. Young Stealers prefer more violent methods: destruction of property, kidnapping, even outright murder. As they age, however, they seem to gain an appreciation for more subtle strategies. They seduce away husbands or wives, and alienate parents and children. They methodically undermine and destroy careers. They mount whispering campaigns to drive away friends. The most artful Stealers of all manipulate their targets to do the job for them, alienating their own friends and sabotaging themselves in the workplace. A victim's life can collapse before him without his ever laying eyes on the Stealer who destroyed him. One infamous attack placed a first-grade teacher's name on a community-notification database of registered sex offenders, with corroborating documentation placed in various public records. The target was never able to clear his name.

Defending against a Stealer's attacks is nearly impossible. The Stealers of Lives are professional character assassins, and every one of their attacks has been months or years in the planning. Most of them also possess vast resources -- cash and equipment stashed away under dozens of identities. Even tracing the various facets of a Stealer attack back to the source can be a Herculean task; the Stealers of Lives are very particular about covering their tracks through multiple blinds, agents, and false identities. Furthermore, a victim trying to fight back must usually fight alone. It's hard to persuade others that all your troubles are, in fact, due to the actions of a single person; indeed, attempting to do so may get you institutionalized.

Stealers of Lives typically work alone. However, they do seem to keep in loose contact, and will assist one another if

the attack requires more manpower than the attack's initiator can supply. Usually older Stealers call on younger ones; whether this derives from a system of social rank within the Stealers of Lives or simply from the tendency of older Stealers to construct more complicated attacks in not known.

Externally, Stealers of Lives are indistinguishable from humans. Dissection will reveal that a Stealer lacks any sort of heart. Cryptobiologists are still trying to determine how their circulatory system works; they bleed and have arteries and veins, but there is no discernible pump. Stealers may not necessarily be detectable by the absence of a heartbeat; some Stealers have developed the ability to simulate a heartbeat through the control of internal musculature.

Stealers of Lives in the Campaign

The most direct way to introduce the Stealers into a campaign is for one of the PCs to be selected as a Stealer's next target. The nature of the assault depends, of course, on the tone of the game. In a heroic game, the order of the day may be false accusations of crimes, mysterious attacks on friends and dependents, or quests to find the antidote to a strange poison administered to a friend. A psychologically-oriented game may call for a more subtle alienation of a character's relationships: friends, Dependents, Patrons, Allies. The GM may even want to sow suspicion of the target among other PCs (though not every group will find intra-party intrigue fun).

Alternately, the Stealer's target may be someone else in the PCs' life. Friends may suddenly fall prey to a whole host of misfortunes. It can be particularly interesting if the Stealer attacks a character's (or a party's) Patron -- a major source of support is suddenly cut off. The Stealer may even make it seem as if the Patron has betrayed the character. The character will have to decide whether to stand by his Patron or let her fall.

Perhaps most subtly, the GM may introduce the Stealers of Lives into a campaign by having the PCs' current enemy become a Stealer target. Initially, they may celebrate their foe's frustration, but in the long run they will rue their first glimpse of the Stealers of Lives.

Possibilities to Consider

- **Motive:** So why do they do it? Perhaps they feed off the fear and confusion of a person whose life is collapsing. Perhaps their attacks are revenge against humanity for a long-forgotten affront. Perhaps they are the advance force of an alien invasion, carefully undermining Earth society one person at a time. Or perhaps they attack to *reproduce*, waiting until a target is completely without friends or other contacts before taking them to be transformed into the newest Stealer of Lives.
- **This Is No Alien:** What if the Stealers were just thoroughly demented humans? They may be some sort of chaos cult, wreaking havoc on people's lives for the sheer thrill of it or to feed their hungry god. They may be a secret society dedicated to amusing themselves by playing with the "weaker classes." Or they may be just an elite, ultra-mysterious order of character assassins, plying their trade for the highest bidder. If the Stealers are human, what's the story behind the missing heart? Do they really have the power to remove their own hearts and survive, or is it just a clever myth spread to confuse those who seek to understand them?
- **Illuminated Stealers:** One particularly good place to use the Stealers of Lives is an Illuminated campaign. They may be a power in the secret war unto themselves, or they may simply be a valuable tool in the hands of the Secret Masters. Every Illuminatus worth his fnord could make ample use of their finely honed talents against his enemies. A cabal of Stealers can make hash of even the most carefully constructed web of intrigues, turning servants against masters and dissipating years of accumulated leverage. The only question is what you could offer the Stealers that they would want . . . and that you would be willing to give.

Out of the Picture

Okay; this week's column may be a bit abbreviated, because yesterday I hit my finger with a hammer. And it hurt. A lot. So I'm currently typing about 17 words a minute, which is a far cry from my top speed.

First things first. You've probably noticed we don't have a Suppressed Transmission this week. This is because Ken Hite's office flooded over the Thanksgiving weekend due to a burst ceiling pipe, setting his work schedule back considerably. Hopefully Ken will be back up to full writing speed shortly, and in the interim we wish him all the best. As someone who's suffered two plumbing problems in the past few years, one catastrophic and one merely bad, I definitely empathize.

(I swear I'll be talking about roleplaying. I'll tie it all together. Honest.)

Speaking of plumbing problems, I *finally* got my sink fixed on Wednesday. Make a note, renters: The phrase, "How much should I deduct from next month's rent?" can be a *very* effective tool for getting repairs completed in a timely fashion.

Finally, Keith Johnson, Assistant Webmaster and the hombre responsible for our logos, much of our art, and generally making *Pyramid* look good, is a proud father. Congratulations, Keith and Robin! Danica Lynn Johnson, welcome to the outside world.

So . . . hammers, floods, children: what's the connection? Well, they all involve being out of the picture (we have a column title!).

In many of the RPGs I play in, we'll often take turns GMing in the same universe. This makes for some interesting adventures, as differing people's views on the same world help to shake things up periodically. Unfortunately, one of the problems we ran into early on was the need to minimize the role of the GM's character(s) when that GM takes over. Because, if he normally plays suave international spy Stock . . . Jim Stock, why is Stock suddenly so quiet this adventure just because the acting GM doesn't want him hogging the spotlight?

The way I generally get around this problem when I GM is to have my character be busy. After all, these characters are supposed to be somewhat realistic, and that sometimes means occasionally having better things to than sitting around waiting to help out your pals.

Coming up with reasons for characters to be busy is also useful for those groups who like to meet even though a player is going to be absent. Admittedly it's difficult to come up with reasons Thog the Mage isn't there when the entire party is trapped in the Seventh Level of Heck, but it's fairly easy to come up with reasons Thog's not there *before* everyone meets the map-toting old man at the inn.

Finally, coming up with good on-the-spot reasons for characters to be busy is a useful skill for GMs to hone; it helps keep players from short-circuiting adventures by going to see an NPC you forgot about, but they didn't.

GM: Okay; the village is being held hostage by a giant dragon. You are their only hope. What do you do?

Players: We teleport over to Doug Dragonslayer and teleport back with him!

GM: Um . . . he's . . . doing his taxes right now.

So to help get the old creative juices flowing, here are some ideas to consider:

- **Personal.** *Good things happen.* A child is born. A family member gets married. The character goes on a long-deserved trip. The character is requested to make a speech or attend a function in her honor. *Bad things happen.* A dependant gets sick or dies. The character gets sick or injured. Massive home problems (flood, fire, break in)

keep the character from helping. The character struggles with one of his personal disadvantages (alcoholism, hunted, laziness).

- **Professional.** The character gets an assignment that takes him away from the main group. The character gets promoted, requiring that he receive training or other reeducation. The character gets a lead on her Big Personal Goal (the conspiracy, the ancient magical secret, the location of the long lost brother) that requires her to investigate it. The character gets training to increase skills.
- **Other.** The mission presents some direct conflict for the character. The character doesn't *want* to get involved with a particular adventure. The character is assigned to work on some other tangential aspect of the adventure (a personal favorite of mine).

If you want to help your GM, you may want to come up with a list of ideas why your character can't attend a particular mission. Heck, maybe your GM will even use some those ideas to come up with plotlines!

So here's hoping we're not all out of the picture come next time. Maybe I'll be able to type next week!

* * *

By the by, it looks like I'm going to have some free time over the holidays, and the slushpile is actually fairly under control at the moment. So if you want to submit something to us, now might be a good time.

And, as ever, feel free to [write me](#) with any other comments, questions, or observations.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Chronomancer**, p. 67.

(Four stars) "Zrfff is a freewheeling place, with a constantly changing landscape and architecture altered by the magical whims of its inhabitants, a race of humanoid imps. Anything goes on this Fifth Dimensional planet (as long as it's funny)."

Pyramid Review

Fields of Honor: The American War for Independence

Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

Designed by Shane Lacy Hensley

Boxed Set; $29.95

After several unavoidable delays, Pinnacle Entertainment Group (PEG) has released the first of its new Showcase Game series: *Fields of Honor: The American War for Independence* (*FoH: AWI*). While more limited in scope and complexity than the original *Fields of Honor*, a 19th Century miniatures rule set, *FoH: AWI* allows beginning and experienced players alike with an enjoyable and attractive game that can be easily played within fifteen minutes of opening the box.

The short start time is made possible by the materials included in this boxed set. In addition to the 48-page rulebook and a pair of ten-sided dice, *FoH: AWI* comes with 208 counters representing the units detailed in the rulebook, units for the campaign game, and earthworks. In addition, two double sided, poster-sized sheets provide battlefield maps. One map depicts Brandywine and Monmouth battlefields and the other has Saratoga on one side and Bunker Hill, Guilford Courthouse, and a third small "generic" battlefield on the reverse.

The counters are attractive as well as functional. In the case of the combat units, the circular counters (each roughly the size of a penny) are two-sided with depictions of the units in line and march column formations. Combat and movement attributes are present on both sides. The print is necessarily small but fairly easily read due to smart layout. The smaller counters, used for leaders and for the campaign game, have to carry less information and, as a result, remain readable as well. The campaign counters aid this process by represent the combat strength of a unit pictorially (the reverse side gives no indication as to the force size.

The rule set is simple without being simplistic. The target number for any action is a 5 on a d10 and is modified depending on the unit's morale, location, and armament. This system is simple enough to be picked up within minutes by an inexperienced player who might otherwise be intimidated by a wargame. Indeed, the attractiveness of the presentation may attract new gamers to the hobby.

FoH: AWI also contains rules for miniatures. Players familiar with the 19th Century rule set will find much that is familiar here (as well in the counter game). The rules have been streamlined for a much faster play. In both forms of the game, whether a unit becomes a casualty is determined on whether or not it fails a morale test, reflecting the tendency of units to rout rather than stand and be shot to pieces, as on later battlefields. PEG is supporting these miniatures rules with a line of 15mm miniatures, available both through retail stores and through their online store. Basing for the 15mm figures is three infantry figures per stand and three stands per regiment. Cavalry units have two figures per stand with three stands per regiment. Artillery stands have one gun with four crewmen. 15mm figures are based on 1"x1" stands while 25mm figures are placed on 2"x2" stands.

The campaign game is fought over a simplified and slightly stylized map of the eastern seaboard, running from Savannah to Quebec. While this map does leave off several key locations (Nova Scotia in the north and the western forts so skillfully defeated by George Rogers Clarke), it would not be difficult to work these sites onto the map. Despite these rather minor quibbles, however, the system feels quite sound.

Purchasers of the game with internet access can also look forward to PEG's well-earned reputation of offering errata and game support on their website. Even before the game hit the retail market, the website provided the statistics for a

generic Indian unit -- necessary for those players wishing to re-fight such battles as Oriskany or Bennington.

The game is not without some small defects. There are some minor typographical errors in the text but not so many as to become distracting. The level of protection offered by earthworks is left somewhat vague (Shane Hensley, the author of the rules, has clarified this and confirms that they provide hard cover). In addition, those familiar with the old *Fields of Honor* system of sliding unit size, which allowed you to fight everything from a skirmish at the section level to fielding entire brigades, may be disappointed to find the new system designed for the regimental level (approximately 300 men per unit). It should probably be said, however, that having a fixed size for units in a game is probably the norm rather than the exception in wargames, especially one that can function for both miniatures and counters. In addition, the regiment was seen as the standard unit at this period. It is also true, however, that the reality of the time was that full strength units were not always present on the field. While this can be easily represented in a miniatures game by fielding under-strength units, it is less easily represented in the counters game. Under-strength units may have their fire and/or melee ratings downgraded in the Order of Battle (where troops are assigned before the game) or perhaps by assigning penalties to particular units. Neither of these approaches are specified in the game but this reviewer has used the former in attempting to draw up Orders of Battle for some historical battles.

Despite these minor points, *Fields of Honor: The American War for Independence* remains a welcome addition to the market, is an excellent introduction to wargaming, and well worth the cost. The back of the box indicates that sets for the Napoleonic era, the Civil War, and World War Two may become available in the future. The $30 price tag seems standard for most wargame/miniatures rule sets and is made more attractive by the ability to use the game within minutes instead of having to wait for the painting to be finished makes the game worth the price. The flexibility of the counters, which enable you to refight almost the entire Revolutionary War, makes the price unquestioningly fair.

-- Matthew DeForrest

?

by Elizabeth McCoy

*(This piece, despite being written by the **In Nomine** Line Editor, is not even **remotely** canon, nor likely to become so, as of this writing.)*

In *GURPS Places of Mystery*, there's a section on ley lines. In the expanded description of David, Archangel of Stone (in *Fall of the Malakim*, p. 14, and *Superiors 1*, p. 8), there is a Servitor Attunement, Geomancy, which allows a celestial to position himself appropriately at dawn and gain extra Essence.

And then, in the *Corporeal Player's Guide*, there are sorcerers, who are able to accomplish things that celestials believe no mortal should be *able* to accomplish without the use of Ethereal or Celestial Songs -- or at all!

This can all be put together, of course.

According to *Places of Mystery*, ley lines were (re?) discovered in 1921, by a businessman named Alfred Watkins, in England. In 1922 and 1925, he published books about this, naming them "ley" lines because the ancient sites that stood atop them often had "-ley" in their name.

(Of course, "leigh" and "ley," often pronounced "lee," is a common component of English surnames. It means "meadow." And England is filled with enough ancient sites that you probably could make any number of lines between them. However, let us not debunk. We *know* ley lines of some sort exist in *In Nomine*!)

Ley lines were claimed to be many things, from mere "prehistoric roads" (marked with *medieval* churches and castles), to weak points in space-time where you could see the Loch Ness monster more easily (or get sucked in yourself), to lines of mystic power which UFOs could tap into to travel upon. Some dowsers claimed to be able to detect the ley lines. Groups of ley lines sometimes intersect, and are frequently called "nodes" in various fiction literature.

In the *Liber Servitorum*, we learn that at least two groups of ethereal spirits -- the Benevolent Space Brothers and the Greys -- have taken on the seemings of UFO creatures. (We won't ask if the ideas and forms they borrowed from humanity's beliefs are real or false. That would be another article.) And then there's Ofanim and Elohim, of course, or other sorts of ethereals.

Clearly, ley lines are lines of *energy*, Essence drawn primarily from the Earth, and perhaps even some sort of mutated Tether from the long-ago past when David was experimenting. Or perhaps they're the remains of many, *many* Tethers, ethereal and

celestial, reaching out to each other . . . Individually, they've faded and are no longer Seneschal'ed, no longer funnel Essence to their masters. But if you can stand within the faint, collapsed web of them . . .

So why must a celestial with Geomancy reposition himself every time he wants to tap into this power, instead of being able to just stand at a previously established nexus point? This is simple, and has to do with the nature of celestials, and the fact that they are "out of place" on Earth. They must constantly rebalance themselves within the ever-changing Symphony to take advantage of ley lines and the Word of Stone. And indeed, ley lines on Earth probably change position slowly over time -- some ruins are merely ruins now. Between that, subtle shifts in the Earth's magnetic field, and solar flares, celestials have to make their daily Perception roll to find the currents. But once they are in that delicate, harmonious spot-of-the-day, they can access an extra point of Essence or two.

But humans have no such difficulties. Humans are native to Earth, and are thus naturally "in tune" with the Symphony. Once they find a "sweet spot," they can exploit it with varying degrees of success until it actually *does* move away -- which may take years, at least, if not centuries or millennia. Such a pity, that most of humanity has no way to take advantage of ley lines, except sorcerers . . .

Ley Sorcerers

Start with the ancient traditions, passed down from druids or witches, kept alive by hopeful ethereals and demons of Sorcery. Add a touch of insularity to keep them from getting out into general sorcerous knowledge. This isn't hard; most circles are convinced they've discovered the One True Way of Sorcery, and aren't inclined to risk themselves by experimenting with someone else's tradition. It's never a good idea to get experimental when you're playing with demons, after all.

Then add in a few variant rituals . . .

Tapping Lines for Essence

Ley sorcerers may use a variant of the Siphon Essence ritual (p. 41 of the *Corporeal Player's Guide*) to tap the energy of the ley lines. The sorcerer must be within 6 feet of the line. The ley line does not get a roll to resist having Essence drawn from it, but the variant ritual requires 1 *hour* per point of Essence drawn, up to a maximum of the check digit of the successful performance. (The 2 Essence to fuel the ritual is paid up front, with the initial 1 minute time to begin the tapping process.)

There are rumors of yet another variant, which allows near-instantaneous tapping of Essence -- and can be performed during such things as Will-Wars . . .

Rituals on a Line

At the GM's option, any attempt to summon an ethereal being (or dream-shade) may have a +1 bonus if done on a line, at a node, or while Walking the Road of Worlds (below). Or a bonus for each, at +1/+2/+3, respectively.

Also, nodes may be more effective places for Protective Wards; with a variant performance, even the lowest level Protective Ward may last indefinitely (until it has been broken down), as it can tap the node's Essence to maintain itself. Permanent Ward may also be renewed -- indefinitely, though a sorcerer must still muster up the Essence to refuel it.

Symphonic Awakenings and Sorcerous Initiations may be easier on lines or at nodes (such as Stonehenge, say). Give Awakenings a bonus of +1 to the check digit, and Initiations a bonus of the initiate's Celestial Forces to Will, if the ritual is performed entirely upon a line or node.

Standing stones often mark ley lines -- and may be handy spirit anchors. Normally, they won't be much use against an ethereal spirit -- but if you can use them against an ethereal while Walking the Road of Worlds (below), one could likely be trapped that way, and would remain even after the ritual were ended.

Necromantic rituals are unlikely to gain much benefit from being performed on a ley line, unless the line is being used to tap Essence.

Special Ley Line Rituals

(For the most part, these rituals have been based on, and translated/heavily mutated from, spells in *GURPS Places of Mystery*. One ritual, Walking the Road of Worlds, is not based upon these spells, but is instead inspired by Barbara Hambly's novel, *The Silicon Mage*.)

Each of the following is a ritual based on the sorcerous skill of *Ley Dowsing*, also referred to as "Dowsing." Ley Dowsing requires the dowser to have 6 Forces, as it is a way of listening to the Symphony, but Sorcerous Initiation or Symphonic Awakening is unnecessary for the base skill. At the GM's option, some prophets may also be able to sense the lines, despite having fewer than 6 Forces. The rituals themselves *do* require Sorcerous Initiation.

Dowsing (Perception)

This skill permits the user to sense ley lines. Some use branches or pendulums, others feel the tingling in their bare feet (or a tugging of their entire bodies) as they get closer to the line. An experienced dowser can also make a simple Perception roll without invoking his skill, and see if a place is a likely candidate for ley lines from the way the trees grow, or placement of standing stones or ruins. (This is something the GM could roll privately.)

The Glowing Road (Sense Leys)   (Dowsing/1)

To the performer's eyes, nearby (within his total Forces in yards) ley lines will glow, and even illuminate other objects! Stronger lines will be brighter, and weaker ones dimmer. Corrupted ones (see below) glow with a sickly, diseased purple-green-black. The performer -- and he alone -- may even be able to read by the light of the strongest lines.

To allow others to see the glow, double the time to perform, and add 1 Essence per additional viewer (who must participate in the ritual).

Time to Perform: 1 hour
Duration: check digit minutes
Essence Cost: 1

Purify the Road   (Dowsing/2)

A corrupted ley line (see below) can be purified by hammering angle-irons into the ground at certain points -- with this accompanying ritual, which points out the exact point of grounding required. (A mundane or dowser without this ritual may attempt to do the same by trial and error. Sometimes it works, and could be considered time spent *learning* this ritual, even without a teacher.)

Time to Perform: 15 minutes
Duration: N/A
Essence Cost: 3

Whisper Down the Road (Ley Communication)   (Dowsing/3)

This ritual allows the performer to speak mind-to-mind with someone else upon the same ley line. (Use the mechanics of the Ethereal Song of Tongues, except for the vastly expanded range.) The speaker must know the other being well enough to visualize him or her (and is at a -3 to skill if he can only recall the sound of the target's voice). If the other being is several nodes away, but on a line that is connected to the line or node the performer is on, use the check digit to determine how many nodes the message can traverse before losing coherency.

Needless to say, if either performer or recipient move off the ley line, the communication is instantly broken.

Time to Perform: 10 minutes
Duration: (CD x Essence spent) minutes
Essence Cost: 2 (minimum)

Walk the Road of Air (Ley Flight)   (Dowsing/4)

The performer(s) may fly along the ley line, at up to 50 feet above it or to either side, as if with the Corporeal Song of Motion. Moving too far from the line will cause a crash, as the power runs out. When the duration runs out, the performer(s) will drift quickly to the ground.

Time to Perform: 2 hours
Duration: 10 + CD minutes, plus one minute per additional Essence spent

Essence Cost: 10

Mark the Road (Ley Telekinesis)   *(Dowsing/5)*

This functions like the Ethereal Song of Motion, and ley sorcerers believe this ritual was used to move standing stones to mark nodes and otherwise keep flying sorcerers from meeting a messy ending. The subject may be a giant stone, or a living creature -- if someone will hold still long enough. It's subject to the same restrictions as Walking the Road of Air, and if someone manages to never learn the simpler rituals to perceive the ley lines, he can always just float large boulders to the sides until they fall.

The weight which can be lifted is 100 pounds per Essence spent. (And a performer can ride along on one of the lifted things, if it's twice his own weight, for free.)

Time to Perform: 1 hour
Duration: (CD x Performer's skill) minutes
Essence Cost: 1 per 100 pounds

Walk the Road of Worlds   *(Dowsing/6)*

With enough Essence, one may start from one node -- intersection of 3 or more ley lines -- *or* an endpoint with no other connections . . . and get to any other node or endpoint connected to it, in a single night. Many traditions say that the ritual *must* be started at sundown, or midnight, or it will not work. Others only require that the sun *be* down. The ritual must be performed at a node or endpoint, and leaving the road before reaching another one is *not* advised. (People tend to . . . vanish.)

Also, one must keep moving, and keep awake. Small creatures (like babies) can be carried, but those who stop and take a nap upon the Road of Worlds might never return -- at the least, it will end the trip right there, and "right there" may be anywhere the GM thinks . . . amusing.

If all goes well, the performer and any companions will find themselves on a slightly neglected path of Roman-like paving stones, walking between large standing stones. No matter what they pass through (cities, walls, oceans . . .), they see only fields and forests beyond the stones, lit by whatever moon- or starlight they started with. Nodes appear to be cross-roads. No machines powered by anything but human power can be taken on the Road -- cars and motorcycles just don't work, though bicycles will, as will Walking the Road of Air.

Time spent on the Road of Worlds is . . . odd. Dallying until subjective sunrise is another thing that is ill-advised, but so long as you keep walking, you wind up at the end-node at sunrise, or the amount of time you took to get there -- whichever is less. Essence regenerates at perceived time rates.

You can follow someone on the Road, but unless you leave within sight of them, you won't catch up, though you might see evidence of their passing. (Discarded candy wrappers, etc.) From the outside, the travelers will simply seem to fade from sight in a "natural" way -- a mist obscures them, or the shadows swallow them up.

Some sorcerers speculate that the Road of Worlds runs through the Marches itself, and that the Wild Hunt of legend uses it -- either exclusively, or to get to Earth and back again . . .

Time to Perform: 5 minutes, walking and meditating quietly, to start; 1 round of concentration at each node passed
Duration: 1 night
Essence Cost: 5 to start the journey, +1 per companion. 1 per traveler at each node passed, until the final, destination node. If the performer(s) cannot muster up enough Essence, the journey ends there.

Corrupted Ley Lines

Since ley lines are things of the corporeal realm, they can be affected by the corporeal realm. If too much "negative

energy" is around them, they will become dark and poisonous, dangerous to use. Celestials with the appropriate attunement will simply "route around" such lines, usually unaware of their presence. Sorcerers who don't know better may tap them for Essence, with consequences as unpleasant as the GM wishes. Ley rituals performed upon a corrupted line are also likely to be twisted, again, as amusingly as the GM desires. (Walking the Road of Worlds through a corrupted stretch of line is probably survivable, but there's no telling what might appear.)

Those living near a corrupted line may suffer accidents and sickness, and growing things will become stunted or die; pure lines allegedly aid in plant growth.

It's up to the GM to decide what corrupts a ley line. Too much technology in an area might disrupt the delicate energies, or something that might otherwise cause a demonic Tether could contaminate the existing lines of Essence. Too much *Symphonic disturbance* could also contribute to the poisoning of a ley line! (Which would make it necessary for ley sorcerers to cleanse their lines periodically, after summonings -- if they cared.)

Ghosts

One interesting variation is to have a ghost (see the ***Corporeal Player's Guide*** or the Pyramid [Lost Souls] article) attach itself to a ley line as its focus, perhaps being able to move along any connected line as well. This might only extend its range vastly, or it might actually be easier for a ghost to anchor itself, giving a +2 or higher bonus to the soul's Will roll. Even if the anchoring doesn't get a bonus, the GM might want a ghost anchored to a ley line or node to be able to tap the lines for Essence, much like the Seneschal of a Tether. (The GM will have to assign an Essence flow to the anchoring ley line, probably following the guidelines in the ***Liber Castellorum***, to determine how much Essence the ghost could tap.)

Ley Lines in the Campaign

Ley lines are most commonly associated with foggy English hills, but they are undoubtedly all over the world. If there aren't too many nodes underwater, a ley sorcerer could Walk the Road of Worlds from one continent to another, confounding celestials who are used to humans being stuck with airplanes while they can make use of handy Tethers to move from one country to another quickly.

GMs will (probably) not want to give *unlimited* power to sorcerers who control a line or node. The Essence flow rules for Tethers, from the ***Liber Castellorum***, p. 14, can help determine how much energy is available to any given sorcerers at a given time. If someone attempts to tap a line for Essence it does not have, the ritual will either fail, or work more slowly. (Wards will need large amounts of Essence to stay up.) Since this makes Essence back into a scarce resource, sorcerous circles will not want to share their knowledge too freely -- lest other circles be using *their* nodes when *they* need the energy!

Naturally, this will make ley sorcerers rare, and powerful! With more energy than usual available to them (and without animal or human sacrifice, even!), as well as esoteric rituals, they can exert quite a bit of influence -- ley sorcerers are likely to fit the bill for Illuminati-style secret societies, or perhaps even the Dozen.

Of course, the Dozen are a myth. Any demon knows that.

Ley Lines in In Nomine

Just don't hang around chanting humans in stone circles. Better safe than sorry.

by Kurt Brown

Player's Information

Located two parsecs from the Tischaune, the proto-star known as Vagabond was detected almost by accident by members of the Scout Service Technical Services Branch team based on Tischaune. While testing a new high-sensitivity optical telescope designed to be part of a larger deep-space interferometer, technicians targeted the nearby Salome system, six parsecs away. The lead technician on the project noticed a faint ring around the image of Salome. After spending several long and expletive filled hours, the technician decided that there was nothing wrong with the optics or the focusing motors on the array.

In desperation, he contacted a friend of his who was more knowledgeable about astronomy. His friend, on seeing the image of Salome, informed the technician that one of two things had happened. Either they had both developed a case of myopia, or the array had captured a gravity-lensed image of the star caused by a massive object between Tischaune and Salome.

Deep-space astrophysicists and observational astronomers were called in to investigate further and after several days managed to roughly plot the position of a trans-solar "brown dwarf" that they christened Vagabond. Vagabond has become a top-priority target for the Scout Service, as it is one of only a handful of trans-solar worlds discovered to date. The adventurers have the distinct honor of being the first citizens to visit this wandering world.

Details of Vagabond

Location: Two parsecs anti-spinward from Tischaune
Classification: Trans-Solar Gas Giant/Brown Dwarf
Size: 95,000 miles in diameter
Mass: 0.06 Solar Masses
Composition: Hydrogen/Methane atmosphere, possible liquid hydrogen core
Moons: None
Rotational Period: 17 hours
Axial Tilt: N/A

Vagabond is an enormous gas giant, originally part of a nearby nebula, that was flung into deep space during the early formation of it's parent system by the passage of another star. Had Vagabond not been sent on its interstellar journey, it would probably have gathered enough mass from its stellar "nursery" to become a small star, part of a double system. It has enough mass to emit a significant amount of infrared energy, but does not "shine" in visible wavelengths. Vagabond is currently traveling through interstellar space at 24,000 mph due rimward along the plane of the galaxy.

GM's information

Unlit by any nearby star, Vagabond offers a truly surreal appearance to the newly arrived Scouts. It glows with a dim reddish glare produced deep within the crushing depths of its core. Streaked with rapidly rotating bands of clouds thousands of miles wide, it looks like a reasonable substitute for the countless visions of hell handed down throughout history. Flashes of lightning constantly flare across the tops of the miles-deep cloudbanks. The overall effect is one of foreboding, as this immense proto-star appears to roll through space at almost seven miles per second.

Vagabond is not alone on its journey through interstellar space. At some point in the distant past, another starfaring race used Vagabond as a deep space refueling station. Circling the world in a low orbit is an automated refueling and repair station, still barely functioning after untold millennia. A sensors roll at -5 will locate the station. Should the team fail to find it during their routine scans of the planet, their probing will activate the automated station, drawing it to them.

The station resembles a huge flattened doughnut, almost half a mile across, with eight flexible arms extending out from its edge at regular intervals. The station has three other ships already in its grasp. They are docked to ports located near the base of the flexible arms that are wrapped around them like snakes. None are of familiar design, although one of them does bear the markings of the early Empire. All appear to be in excellent shape.

As the adventurers near the station, they will be hailed in an unfamiliar, mechanical language. Attempts to respond to the hail go unnoticed by the decaying electronics of the station. After several more attempts to contact the Scouts, the primitive artificial intelligence of the station will come to the same conclusion that it has at least three times before: The ship must be too damaged to respond properly. In its mind, such a damaged ship is in danger of falling into the planet, so speed is essential. The station has surprising agility for a structure its size (4-g maneuver drive) and will quickly move to grab the Scout's ship. If they fire on the station, it will not respond but will add "malfunctioning weapons systems" to its damage report.

Once the ship has been captured by one of the flexible arms, it will pull the adventurer's ship down to a docking port where smaller tentacles will extend and wrap around the front of the vessel. Once it is firmly secured, additional tentacles will extend further along the hull looking for fuel ports, maintenance hatches, and other access points along the hull. The ship will not be able to pull away unless it has drives rated for more than 4 g's, and might damage weaker drives if the attempt is made.

Refined fuel will be pumped into the tanks. Exterior damage will be repaired and repainted to match the ship's color scheme. Capacitors will be recharged. Then the trouble begins.

"Let's just pop the hood and have a look. . ."

Once the routine maintenance has been performed, the station will hail the ship and request access to the interior for additional repair work. If the Players have translation computers and the required skills to operate them, they may attempt to translate the language of the station with a -2 to all rolls. Otherwise, the station will assume that communications are still off-line and proceed without permission. If the adventurers insist that their ship is undamaged and they do not need assistance, the station will assume a malfunctioning crew and add them to the list of items that need repairs.

The station extends a docking clamp, latches onto the airlock, and waits for the Scouts to open the hatch. If they do not open it within three minutes, a swarm 3d6 robot "sea urchins" about six inches in diameter will float down the docking

umbilical and begin to burn their way through the outer airlock door. It will take them five minutes to burn through the door. If the adventurers open the hatch before it is cut open, the robots will stop and attempt to enter the ship. Any attacks on the sea urchins will be ignored (treat them as small, moving targets with DR 10 and HT 5), although replacements will quickly arrive to continue the repairs. They will tune the drives, clean the air scrubbers, and attempt to repair the "malfunctioning" communications equipment and ships weapons. Since the station does not stock identical replacements for the ship's equipment, it removes the items and advises the adventurers that they will need to wait for a re-supply ship to arrive with replacements. As they try to decide what to do next, a two-meter tall floating urchin will arrive at the airlock and indicate that it wishes for the Players to follow.

"Looks like you're gonna need a new crew. . ."

If the Scouts go with the large urchin, they will be lead to a circular waiting room with shallow depressions in the floor filled with the remains of ancient cushions. Upon further inspection, several mummified bodies from at least three different species are discovered in the pits. If questioned about this, the large urchin will indicate that they were defective parts of the other vessels that were being held until suitable replacements arrive. If the adventurers point out that the crewmen are dead, the urchin will merely confirm that they are malfunctioning, then leaves via one of eight passages that radiate away from the waiting room.

At this point, the GM is free to lead the players down whatever road they wish. The interior of the station is dark, moody, and should result in at least one fright check per player if handled properly. Within the station there are signs of ancient struggles between the crews of the other ships and the station, more bodies, and several sealed doors that have obviously been the targets of attempts to force them open.

At first, the station will merely ignore the Scouts attempts at communication or escape. Gradually, the deteriorating circuits will drive the station deeper and deeper into madness as the adventurer's efforts to escape grow more intense. It has dozens, maybe hundreds, of robotic minions to deploy against them, but it is not invincible. The station is advanced but old, and as more damage is done it will begin to lose control of its basic functions such as lighting and environmental controls. Eventually the station's higher functions will begin to fail, and its orbit around Vagabond will begin to decay rapidly. A dramatic ending should have the Scouts dashing down a flailing umbilical to their ship as the station begins to plunge into the dense atmosphere below.

The GM should be careful not to let too much advanced technology fall into the player's hands. Several heavy doors seal off the three ships that are tethered to the station. Inside the station, the sea-urchin robots (designed to resemble the race that built them) are portable and might be worthwhile if the adventurers can avoid the micro-fusion torches each robot has and find a way to contain or disable them. The robot urchins are not independently intelligent, relying on information and direction from the station to function properly. However, the advance micro-circuitry would be of great interest to certain individuals or companies. Other than the robots, there should not be too much lying around for them to grab on their way out the door, although this might be a good opportunity to introduce that one "special" device that has been gathering dust in your desk drawer.

Remember that once the Scouts escape from the station, they still have to survey Vagabond. Who knows what else lurks behind the rim of this hellish world?

Pyramid Review

Cry H.A.V.I.C. Miniatures Game

Published by [Talon Games](#)

Written by Jon Walker

128 pages, 4 color inserts, 3 record sheets; $19.95

My first impression of *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* was mixed. Initially I was troubled by the cover, which is an incredibly garish yellow; luckily the interior of the book is simple black type on white paper. My second impression was less superficial; at 128 pages not including card inserts, the book is large, very complete and is supported by a very nice line of miniatures.

The title *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* refers to a Heavy Assault Vessel -- Infantry Carrier, a combination landing craft/starship, which is a little unusual for a game of squad based combat; still it does have a ring to it. As far as the game setting is concerned, *H.A.V.I.C.* has a lot going for it. Beginning with a stratification of state and corporate entities on earth, an expansion into space, planet (and later interstellar) wars, and a subsequent proliferation of empires, *H.A.V.I.C.* has a rich world with plenty of room for expansion. The book focuses on two empires: the Ryuuza Imperium (descended from militant Japanese corporations), and The Terran Confederation (an Australian-based dominion). It provides a lot of in depth information on these rivals. Also mentioned are other governments such as the Hellion Commonwealth and New Avalon, but only as tantalizing hints. Hopefully these other nations will be expanded in later releases, as the tantalizing glimpses of New Avalon power armor would make great minis. I would have liked to have seen more and more detailed world information presented, along with a more chapter breaks or an index to readily find info.

The book is designed for wargamers and suffers a little in presuming that all readers will be familiar with the game world. The rules are complete, and game play proceeds at a typical pace for such games. The rules themselves are similar to *Warzone*, and like that game emphasizes close combat over ranged weapons. Close combat is definitely more effective than any other type of combat (e.g. artillery, psyker powers, or simple guns). The idea that close combat in the future is more deadly than ranged weapons is mainly a setting conceit, and gives the game its own flavor. I found it to be highly reminiscent of the armor knights and less effective missile troops of most medieval era war games. This comparison is intentional, as most of the artwork and the miniatures themselves are evocative of knights, dragons and such.

Combat consists of an attacker's control number compared to a defender's opposing number cross referenced on a success/failure table to determine the base to-hit roll required. Modifiers are added to the required die roll, not to the control or opposing numbers. For close combat each unit's Close Assault Value (CAV) are cross-referenced; ranged combat is similar but compares the attacker's Ranged Assault Value (RAV) verses the range bracket (short, medium, long and extreme) to produce the roll required to hit. To damage a target the weapon's Penetration Value (PV) with modifiers must exceed the target's Armor Value (AV). Any positive number is considered a point of damage and removed from the Target's Damage Factor (DF), which serve as hit points. Large robotic killing machines called M.A.R.S. (Mobile Assault Robotic Soldiers) have target areas that must lose their individual DFs to be destroyed. Each unit has 12 stats of which RAV and CAV are two, which makes each unit distinct but also complicated to remember. The game also uses a number of charts and place markers. Luckily there are record sheets to photocopy, a sheet of colored counters, and two combat chart sheets that summarize all the relevant info you need for combat.

Cry H.A.V.I.C. tries very hard to provide all the information you need to play readily at hand, and there is a lot of information to be absorbed. The game has a lot of terms, and almost every unit or piece of equipment has its own

modifiers, which makes *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* a little difficult to get the hang of. Compared to *Warzone* or the latest incarnation of *Warhammer 40K*, *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* is definitely the more complex of the three, but also seems to be able to accommodate more variety of play. The designers have done a good job creating a strong rule that accommodates almost every aspect of combat as well as providing a framework that could be expanded into an RPG. Examples of actions (most units have three) include move, evade search, aim, or open a window. Units can also have skills such as leadership, tactics, technician, and medical. It wouldn't take much work to expand the skill system into a full blown RPG.

Beginning wargamers might be wise to pick up a less complex game first, but then it's unlikely that *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* would be picked up by beginners. It's not so complex that a beginner couldn't understand it, but it's no cakewalk either. Of course the best reason to pick up *Cry H.A.V.I.C.* is for the miniatures, which are well-designed and well-molded in dynamic poses. The minis are cast in 25mm scale with standard units being one piece and larger units such a M.A.R.S units requiring assembly. The figures are well-crafted and the examples I have seen have little flash and are generally clean. The metal is a little soft and narrow appendages such as swords, spears and some gun barrels bend easily. This isn't really a really a problem but just a bit of a surprise, given that most modern castings are as malleable as adamantium.

Cry H.A.V.I.C. has a lot of potential as a miniatures line, a wargame and perhaps even an RPG. I look forward to seeing what Talon Games has in store for future supplements.

-- Andrew Lucas

Pyramid Review

Siege on Tolkeen: Chapter Two, Coalition Overkill
(for Rifts)

Published by [Palladium Books](#)

Written by Kevin Siembieda and Bill Coffin

112 Pages; $12.95

Bad guys, bad guys, and more bad guys. That's what it's all about as Palladium
gives us installment number two in their six part *Coalition Wars: Siege on Tolkeen*
series, *Coalition Overkill*. The book picks up where book one left off, giving us the current state of the war as well as
a bunch of material for GMs running a campaign to play with.

The main focus of the book, as the title would imply, is the Coalition forces and their nasty reaction to the first wave of
fighting in their siege on Tolkeen. It starts with an exploration of the CS's (Coalition State's) reaction to the initial
wave of combat. For those of you who don't remember, the first round didn't go too well for the CS. Their magic-
wielding foes from Tolkeen proved to be far more than the simple opponents that they had thought them to be, and the
CS lost many of their troops and many of their resources accomplishing nothing in the initial stages of fighting. As
Siembieda explains, this has created a sort of backlash effect. At first the Coalition troops were fairly shaken by these
mysterious forces, but the second wave of troops arrived on the scene more resolute and determined than could have
been imagined.

Siembieda explains at length the effect this war has had on the CS troops and the changes they have undergone.
Unfortunately, many of these have been for the worst. Given that the magical forces the CS is up against are so
mysterious and prone to deception, the Coalition has adopted a bit of a "kill all" strategy. This means that a lot of
innocent bystanders -- harmless villagers and the like -- are being slaughtered in the wake of this rampaging army.
While the Coalition was presented as a dynamic, not *all* bad, force in previous material, this book shows their worst
side, depicting them as the horrible monsters they are capable of being.

Profiles are given for several of the major leaders in the assault, and for the most part, these guys are the worst of the
worst. The most notable of them is their leader, General Micander Drogue. This man is evil through and through, and
it is his diabolical intention to see to it that every last citizen of Tolkeen is slaughtered. He is an absolute genius and a
brilliant commander, one who just might prove capable of the horrors of which he dreams. The other leaders are only
better than Drogue in the respect that they have a little less power in their hands with which to do harm. These bad
guys are all a little bit one-sided and lack a bit in dynamics, which may upset some GMs. However, Siembieda goes
into fair detail with their backgrounds, rounding them out as best as possible.

We also get a profile of a mean and nasty CS special ops team called the Dirty Thirty. They're broken up into A, B,
and C teams, each with their own unique abilities. Most of the team members are pretty interesting characters, and the
Dirty Thirty makes for an excellent group of NPC operatives. Hopefully, we'll see a few more special ops teams
profiled in future books as well. Along the same lines, there are profiles for several notable mercenaries as well. Most
of them are pretty interesting, and a lot of attention is paid to the backgrounds of each one. The only downside is that
all of them are CS agents, even though one team is working incognito.

We also get pregenerated stats for most of your standard CS troops; so the next time you've got a CS commando, a
dog boy, or some other CS bad guy jumping from the bushes, you've got all you need right there for you. We also get
details on the concentration camps being set up by the CS to store all the captured prisoners in. It seems that the CS

may be going the route of the WWII Nazis in their war strategies, something that certainly doesn't bode well.

I must admit a little bit of inconsistency here between the early portion of the book and the later. In the beginning, the CS troops are described as being merciless murderers, set on killing everything in their path. Then, all of the sudden, in the end they are putting the prisoners into camps instead of killing them outright. The camps are termed work camps, and the open agenda isn't to have all of the prisoners systematically killed (like in a true concentration camp); however, Siembieda does note that if things go the way General Drogue plans, then these camps will indeed be used as a tool for all-out genocide.

Some of the strongest aspects of the book are the personal accounts of the war. These are stories written in the first person and told by troops on both sides. We get the picture from these stories that the issues aren't all black and white. The troops on either side don't necessarily fight with the genocidal zeal of their leaders, and they do see faults in the acts which they are being ordered to commit. All too often, this sort of fiction is "fluff" that's unimportant and doesn't really need to be read to catch the gist of the material. Here, however, the accounts lend true value to the story and should not be skipped at all.

There is a portion of the book dedicated to what's going on in Tolkeen. In particular, it focuses on the strategies that Tolkeen has been using as it also advances into the second phase of the war. The strategies are all very smart and inventive, using Tolkeen's magical and dynamic forces to their absolute fullest and demonstrating how Tolkeen is dealing with the massive war machine of the Coalition.

We are also finally given the skinny on the Daemonix. The Daemonix are a race of enormous sub-demons from another dimension that Tolkeen has liberated and added to its forces. The beasts are all enormous, terrible, and utterly alien. What makes them more strange is that Tolkeen has grafted all of them with techno-wizard cybernetic enhancements. Thus, Tolkeen has finally acquired some huge, demonic juggernauts to help them win the war. Of course, with Tolkeen using these "demons" as part of their fighting force bears a lot of implications, the least of which is that the Tolkeenites aren't quite the innocent good guys that they think themselves to be.

The book is rounded out with an adventure called "Asher's Revenge." It is pretty straightforward, but involves some fairly heavy hitters, including a couple of very big and mean dragons, so it should be a welcome addition to an ongoing campaign.

The only real downside to the book is that it is somewhat one-sided, focusing very much on the bad guys and not a whole lot else. Of course, given that this book is only one in a six part series, this is certainly excusable; Siembieda definitely has room to focus a little if he wants to. So long as the remaining books take it in different directions (which they most likely will), then *Coalition Overkill* provides a welcome addition to the *Siege on Tolkeen* series.

-- Jon Thompson

Pyramid Pick

The Keeper's Companion (for Call of Cthulhu)

Published by [Chaosium Inc.](#)

Written by Keith Herber, William Dietze, Brian M. Sammons, Charles P. Zaglanis, Lynn Willis, Sandy Petersen, Kevin Ross, Scott Aniolowski, Sam Johnson, Stacy Clark, Peter Jeffrey, Lucya Szachnowski, John B. Monroe, Bruce Balloon, and Davide Gallorini

Illustrated by Drashi Khendup, Earl Geier, Tom Sullivan, Dreyfuss, Lisa A. Free, Jason Eckhardt and Paul Carrick

Cover by Paul Carrick

208 pages; $23.95

For *Call of Cthulhu* Keepers wanting more information about the game and the Mythos, the first purchase in the last few years (after the main rulebook) has been *The Keeper's Compendium*. Unfortunately this book has been out of print since 1996, but now Chaosium have gone one better with the release of the much expanded *The Keeper's Companion*.

Described as "A Core Book For Keepers, Vol. 1," this is 208 pages long (130 more than the *Compendium*), containing the both the material from the *Compendium* and a lot of new stuff as well. It is a impressive looking book, graced by a full-wraparound Paul Carrick cover, depicting an ominously brooding Cthulhu himself. Some of Carrick's previous artwork for Chaosium has tended to be a little too murky, but this is just right, and Chaosium should allow him to do more in this style.

The internal layout is clear and simple, thus living up to Chaosium's usual standard. While discovering that a book this size does not have an index would normally set me howling (for *The Keeper's Companion* does indeed not have an index), Chaosium have more than made up for it by listing every single entry in the book in the Table of Contents at the front.

The majority of the interior art consists of reprinted pieces from the *Compendium*, but each of the *Companion*'s ten chapters has a new piece in the sidebar of left-hand page, which is reversed on the opposite page. These are all drawn by Drashi Khendup, who has previously drawn most of the maps using a computer in Chaosium's more recent releases. While I have disliked his rather soulless cartographic efforts, Khendup's own art is a revelation, and I urge Chaosium to have him draw more art and less maps.

The reprinted material from the original *Compendium* consists of the chapters on "Alien Races," "Forbidden Books," "Mysterious Places," and "Secret Cults," and each has also been slightly amended. This takes two forms: one is updating the material to take account of information found in more recent *CoC* releases, the second is simply attributing the author of that entry and where it first appeared. This is a nice touch, and Chaosium should be applauded

for it. Also reprinted is "Good Cthulhu Hunting," Sandy Petersen's and John B. Monroe's guide to successful investigating from *The Cthulhu Casebook*. This, along with the final chapter, "Skills Revisited," is probably the only section that the players should have access to, and perhaps should have gone into a book meant for the players instead. As an accompaniment to the useful "Good Cthulhu Hunting," Keepers receive their own advice in "13 Suggestions for Keepers," which is equally as good. Experienced and novice Keepers alike will find this worth the read.

Over all I have no real problem with the reprinting of the contents of the *Compendium*, but Chaosium misses an opportunity in the reprinting of the "Forbidden Books" chapter by including only a partial list of More Mythos Tomes from the original book. I would have liked Chaosium to expand upon the titles given in the *Compendium*, rather than just listing just some of them again.

Augmenting the chapter on "Forbidden Books" is one on "Occult Books." There are seventy entries here, broken down into pre-nineteenth century, 1900-1940 and 1941 to the present day lists. As with "Forbidden Books," each entry gives the book's title, language, author, format, date of publication, whether it is in print, and then a more detailed description. Finally the entry adds the possible SAN loss and Occult skill bonus for reading the book. Occasionally an occult title will grant the reader spells and these are also given, but only with their game names. If these books, which the *Compendium* says are all real-world titles, call their spells by something else (as in many of the Mythos tomes in the "Forbidden Books" chapter), I would have liked to have seen these included.

Similar to the chapters on Forbidden and Occult books is "Arcane Antiquities," which contains twenty-three arcane artifacts taken from both Mythos fiction and many previous *Call of Cthulhu* supplements. Each entry is very full and is accompanied by the original artwork, as well as details of any associated creatures. Fiction sources for the artifacts includes stories Lovecraft, Derleth and Clark Ashton Smith, as well as by more modern authors such as Ramsey Campbell and Brian Lumley. A pleasing touch is Chaosium's acknowledgement of the material published by Pagan by including an artefact that originally appeared in Pagan Publishing's *Unspeakable Oath* magazine.

Version 5.5 of the *Call of Cthulhu* rulebook included an eight-page chapter on forensic pathology, but this was not included in the most recent edition (5.6) of the rulebook. Chaosium has rectified this omission by having a twenty-five-page chapter on Forensic Medicine. This covers most things that a Keeper will want to know about the subject, from Coroners and Medical Examiners and their duties, through the nature of deaths via diverse means, to law enforcement and the actual forensic sciences. In addition, the chapter includes a Law Enforcement Timeline and a list, state by state, of when a death falls under the jurisdiction of the coroner's office. At the back of the *Companion* is a sample "Apparent Natural Death" certificate for in game use. This is another useful chapter, and I can see the information here proving very handy in other modern RPGs.

The final chapter of note is "Skills Revisited," with Chaosium admitting that the game's skills have not been looked at in a while. The aim here is not only to expand on the existing skill list from the rulebook, but also to explain what the skills are and what the ratings really mean in each case. New skills include Academic Lore, Academic Standing, Cryptography, Folklore, Hypnosis, Legerdemain, amongst others; expanded skills include adding use of the Internet to the Library Use skill, for example, as well as changing the basic levels for Mathematics and Climb. Many of these new skills have been looked at before -- particularly by Pagan Publishing, so it is nice to see Chaosium provide an official ruling on them. That said, nothing in this chapter is written in stone and Chaosium offers it as an option.

Alongside the numerous chapters in the *Companion*, there are the occasional short pieces and options. These include alternative rules for Resistance Table, losing Sanity, and brainstorming ideas. Of these, the rules on losing Sanity are of more interest than the other two options, but all tend to complicate slightly *Call of Cthulhu*'s simple mechanics.

Any book described as a core item for a game line should be indispensable to a referee, so is this the case with *The Keeper's Companion*? For the long term *Call of Cthulhu* Keeper, who has the original *Compendium* and the supplements from which many of the artifacts are drawn, the *Companion* is not going to be quite as useful as it is to the Keeper who doesn't. Yet to have all of that information in one place, plus everything new that Chaosium has put into the book, means that *The Keeper's Companion* is very nearly indispensable.

The Keeper's Companion is not without its problems, but these are really niggling little grips upon the reviewer's part. Overall, the breadth and usefulness of the information in this book means that every Keeper should have this book as

their *Companion* when running *Call of Cthulhu*.

-- Matthew Pook

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

?

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

?

Murphy's Rules

?

Only 17 Shopping Days 'Til Lux Splendor!

To paraphrase South Park, the holidays are about something very important: *presents*.

Strangely enough, one of my favorite parts of many RPG campaigns isn't the creation of characters, or the discovery of hidden plot, or the inevitable combat with the oily-moustached villain. No, I like the holiday time of gaming worlds.

The gift-giving time of year, be it wintry Judeo-Christian holiday, Lux Splendor, or ancient fae festivals like Boxing Day, usually means downtime (which, as I've said before, I like). It's a quiet moment that's generally consistent from year to year, and (at least in my gaming groups) tends to be memorable. Unlike, say, birthdays, which vary from character to character and tend to get forgotten (in a way unlike most real people), it's a lot easier to look at the big master calendar and say, "Whoops! Holiday time! What's everyone up to?"

These holidays allow characters to give presents to other PCs and NPCs, and allow a unique opportunity for a different kind of characterization, where both the giver and givee can shed new light on their characters, and can introduce (or reintroduce) subplots, character aspects, or even plots.

Consider *Star Trek II: The Wrath of Khan*. In that movie, Dr. McCoy gives Captain Kirk two gifts for his birthday: a bottle of Romulan Ale, and a pair of antiquated Ben Franklin-style glasses. Both gifts reveal much about Dr. McCoy (who is willing to supply highly illegal alcohol to his friend, himself a military lawman, *and* provide a more practical, thoughtful gift)[1], and set up the thematic tensions of growing older, career choices, etc.

So why not give presents to characters in the gaming world, and have presents given to them? They can shed light on NPCs; the narcissistic character can give a mirror (or worse, a picture of himself), the gregarious character can throw a party in the character's honor, the mysterious ally can give the quiet character a tiny bird in a cage.

The holidays are also great for characterization. It says one thing to give a fellow PC a book you think she might like; it's another to give her a copy of *your* character's favorite book. And how your character reacts to those gifts can give new insights. How does your character react when presented with a previously lost shield that belonged to your deceased brother? What does your character do when kissed beneath the mistletoe by a possible romantic interest? Why does your character refuse to give presents?

The gift-giving season can provide plot hooks. Let's face it . . . there aren't many instances where receiving a treasure map *wouldn't* be suspicious. But being given a map by a not-so-close acquaintance who believes it to be worthless is completely believable. An NPC Patron could give the PCs a piece of information or lore that could provide adventure possibilities. An NPC enemy could show up on the holiday eve with a banner of truce; is it a trick?

Finally, depending on the genre, the holidays are a time when *much* less believable incidents (a.k.a. miracles) can occur, and be completely acceptable. As a GM, were you looking for an excuse to bring back a long-lost parent? Did you have a disease subplot that was dragging down the campaign that could be miraculously healed? If the good character has been having a rough year, the holidays are a fine time to balance the scales with a karmic reward.

In many ways I believe the real world and gaming worlds can mirror each other, and the giving and receiving of holiday presents are one of the nicer occurrences. By making your characters thoughtful (or thoughtless), and introducing new curious (and possibly rewards) to think about. you can greatly enrich their characterization in an organic fashion. And, really, isn't that what gaming is all about?

Besides presents?

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

[1] As a completely random aside, I love a piece of creative fixing of a seeming mistake a fan has proposed about *Star Trek II*. In the gift-giving scene mentioned above, Kirk reads the bottle. "2283," he says, squinting to read the bottle. McCoy replies, "Yeah, well, it takes this stuff a while to ferment."

Now, according to the *Star Trek Chronology*, this movie occurs in 2285 . . . so it's not a very fine vintage at all. It has been proposed that the date of the bottle is, in fact, correct; Bones was being ironic about his comment, and really gave his friend galactic hooch, the Romulan equivalent of Thunderbird.

Which, in my mind, sheds even *more* light on McCoy's character.

* * *

Oh, I've also got a note here from K. David Ladage, ringleader behind the *GURPS: Pyramidian Project*:

> The deadline is quickly approaching for submissions into the *GURPS: Pyramidians Project*. The *Pyramidians Project* is a collection of the various members of the *Pyramid* Online community written up as **GURPS** characters.
>
> K. David Ladage will accept submissions for this e-book until the end of December. The book will be edited, formatted and published electronically sometime in early-to-mid Januarys.
>
> More information about the project is available on-line at http://pages.prodigy.net/kdladage/jegame/gpp.html.

I feel I should point out that this project is unofficial, and in no way sponsored by Steve Jackson Games.

But I'll have my writeup in there (once I squirrel a few minutes away to finish it), so you may want to check it out regardless.

* * *

Last week's answer: **The Atlas of the DC Universe**, p. 203.

(Two stars) "Imperial overconfidence remains the Rebellion's biggest advantage in the galactic civil war, and nowhere was this overconfidence personified better than in the Death Star battle station."

High Weirdness Indeed: The Empire State Building

"The reports themselves argue strongly against this. For the reports do not range over a broad spectrum. There are virtually no reports of unidentified sailing objects, or of UFOs with wings or wheels, and there are no reports of flying pink elephants (FPEs!) or of the Empire State Building being seen upside down in Pittsburgh."
-- J. Allen Hynek, "The UFO Mystery," *FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin* (Feb. 1975)

But you know, if people did see a tower "upside down in air" (as T.S. Eliot would, and in fact did, put it), it would probably be the Empire State Building. Much as it galls my skyscraping Chicago soul to admit it, when it comes to capital-T The, capital-T Tower, there can be only one. And what a one it is -- possibly the last truly great building in America, built when Art Deco had aged to mellow perfection, but before the bitter Teutonic winds of the International Style could sweep all ornament and humanity away. Is it any wonder that the Reptoids and the Rosicrucians, Doc Savage and Felix the Cat, King Kong and the C.H.U.D.s, that everybody who isn't anybody fights their secret battles over it through time, space, and dimension? Well, it is a wonder -- and a story. 102 of them, in fact.

"A new and convenient house, barn, and several out-buildings, together with 20 acres of land, situated in the heart of New York Island, along the Middle Road, near the 3-mile stone, about 1/2 mile north from Chelsea Village. . . . . It is confidently expected by those whose opinions are conceded to be found, that the rapid growth of the City and the villages of Greenwich and Chelsea will soon cause the value of the Aforesaid Land to be greatly enhanced."
-- notice for sale by "Jno. Thompson" of the future site of the Empire State Building (1825)

All 102 stories begin in the middle of Manhattan Island, on a swampy site known in colonial times as Sunfish Creek. The lot where Sunfish Creek and another, lesser, stream intersected, was common town property until 1799, when one John Thompson purchased it for $2,400 and built a farmstead there. (The western slice of the future Empire State block had been granted in 1686 to a black man named Francisco Bastian, who sold out to a silversmith thirty years later.) In 1825, Thompson in turn sold the lot to a married couple, the Lawrences, who turned right around and sold it to a man named Charles Lawton for $10,000. Lawton doubled his money in two years, selling the property to William Backhouse Astor for $20,500. The Astor clan, headed by German fur-trader John Jacob Astor, was busily buying up all of New York City that was for sale. In 1849 a slum riot on Astor Place led the Astors north, to the old Thompson farm, where they built a sumptuous mansion at 350 Fifth Avenue. After feuding with his aunt Caroline Astor, William Waldorf Astor tore down his neighboring mansion and replaced it with a "common tavern," the Waldorf Hotel. John Jacob Astor IV responded by tearing down his mother's mansion and building an even grander hotel, the Astoria; cooler family heads prevailed, and the Waldorf-Astoria became a linked "twin" hotel and the center of New York's "tenderloin" district of Mauve Age decadence. Eventually, the Waldorf-Astoria became a victim of its address; midtown property was too valuable to waste on a mere hotel, Waldorf-Astoria or not. The Astors sold the hotel and two acres of the lot to vice-president of General Motors John Jacob Raskob, the duPont brothers, and a pair of silent partners for $16 million -- a tidy profit indeed. And there, Raskob and his architect William Lamb decided to build the world's tallest building.

"The directors of the Empire State, Inc., believe that in a comparatively short time the Zeppelin airships will establish trans-Atlantic, transcontinental and trans-Pacific lines, and possibly a route to South America from the port of New York. Building with an eye to the future, it has been determined to erect this tower to land people directly on Thirty-fourth Street and Fifth Avenue after their ocean trip, seven minutes after the airship connects with the mast."
-- Alfred E. Smith, press release (1929)

They were in competition with Walter Chrysler, who was equally determined that his Chrysler Building should be the world's tallest skyscraper. (The Crash of 1929 knocked a third competitor out of the race before he could break ground.) But, in the game of construction chicken, Chrysler finished first, allowing the Chrysler Building to claim the coveted slot for only a year. Raskob sealed its fate by planning the famed zeppelin mast for the Empire State, raising its height from 86 floors to 102, firmly trumping the Chrysler Building by 204 feet. Sadly, eventual experiments with the Navy airship *Columbia* proved that the powerful updrafts deflected by the building's walls made horizontal docking impossible.

In our world, that is. Surely somewhere or somewhen Yankee ingenuity (or German discipline) keeps zeppelins on an even keel as they debark passengers into the "World's Highest Bar." Fritz Leiber, in "Catch That Zeppelin!" presented an Empire State Building where those worlds overlapped; the Gernsbackian future and the dire present. Norse tradition speaks of Yggdrasil, the tree at the center of the cosmos, the Axis Mundi around which all the worlds revolve; Siberian Tatar shamanism presents the "tree to heaven" as the axle of the world. Which may be why our demigod and protector, Doc Savage, dwelt on the 86th floor of that "gleaming spike of steel and brick" during his crime-fighting career. Perhaps, if one knows the right code to press, you can still emerge in Doc's eyrie. (An irresistible opening for a Cliffhanging Secret Urban [Fantastic] History game presents itself: the PCs discover Doc's dusty and sheet-covered eyrie for themselves when they accidentally activate the hidden relays, and must take up the Man of Bronze's mantle for the 21st century -- get Philip José Farmer's *Doc Savage: His Apocalyptic Life* and Lester Dent's novels, and get started.) There's more adventure in the building directory yet: does the Horatio Club rent out a suite on the 66th floor, or the Pyramid Warehousing Corporation on the 23rd? Why stop with Doc's world, or even our Gernsbackian zeppelin paradise: what if each of the 73 elevators of our Technopolitan Yggdrasil leads to another world, when its buttons depress in kabbalistic sequence?

"[T]he TV tower of the Empire State Building. And tell me to what empire this creation of American initiates refers if not the empire of Rudolf of Prague!"
-- Belbo, in *Foucault's Pendulum,* by Umberto Eco

Of course, if the doors lead to all worlds, some of them might not be pleasant at all. Yggdrasil, after all, had its roots in Hel; persistent urban legend describes secret sub-basements beneath the Empire State Building, headquartering Men In Black or hiding UFOs. (One particularly inventive sort argues that the "Manhattan Project" was so named because the real work, on Tesla-based [Philadelphia Experiment] technology, took place in the chambers beneath the ESB.) These chambers connect to the [secret world of underground] Manhattan (as seen in ***Underworld***, for example) through "triangle-shaped tunnels" reminiscent of the trapezoidal halls [beneath Peru]. Another rumor calls the chambers ritual magical spaces for Satanists preying on the homeless and "missing persons" -- the reliable David Icke not only identifies the Astors (who tunneled under the bog there for a century) as Reptoids, but derives their family name from the dark goddess Ashtoreth. Perhaps the Empire State's parallels should expand to include the voudun "middle post" or poteau-mitan, the doorway for spirits to enter our world. The Empire State has more than its share of spectral tenants: the building killed 14 people during its construction, another 14 died when a B-25 bomber crashed into the 79th floor in 1945, and another 16 leaped from its observation deck in the first 16 years of the building's existence. Our skyscraper also scrapes the bowels of the Pit: here dwell the Mole People, the Masonic Morlocks, the ghouls and the necromancers.

"The logic of the plan is very simple. A certain amount of space in the center, arranged as compactly as possible, contains the vertical circulation, toilets, shafts, and corridors. Surrounding this is a perimeter of office space 28 feet deep. The sizes of the floors diminish as the elevators decrease in number. In essence, there is a pyramid of non-rentable space surrounded by [a greater pyramid] of rentable space."
-- William Lamb, architect of the Empire State Building

Which makes the fact that the Empire State was dedicated on May 1, 1931, all the more disturbing; the Astors are apparently Illuminati, too. Saturn, killer of children, was in the American Eagle, Aquila, on the dedication day, for extra necromantic oomph. It took 410 days to construct; 410 being the kabbalistic value for "Kadosh," the vengeful Templar order of German Masonry. The Waldorf-Astoria was demolished on Black Tuesday, 1929, the destruction of the old financial order; excavation began on January 22, 1930, at the cusp between Capricorn and Aquarius; the building's final official height, with the TV tower, is 1,454 feet -- one less than 1455: "Adam Kadmon," the alchemical Perfect Man. Man, the measure of all things. The building is at Fifth ("gab", or "top"; the sphere of Mars) and Thirty-Fourth ("Babel," as in Tower of); 5x34 is 170, both "staff" and "cup," as well as "Kesilim," or Orion -- the Giant.

"On the lofty minarets of Manhattan there stands day and night an invisible muezzin who calls the faithful to the worship of Mammon and Speed. For our religion is practical pantheism, with energy as the Eternal Substance.
We are the super-city. We are the Nibelungen of the West. We possess the magic Rhine-gold, which is the Holy Grail of man's desire.
We are Gargantua and Siegfried. The old gods across the sea are graying. Already their Goetterdaemmerung has

begun.
Come we, the newer Titans: and we are not yet pubescent."
-- Benjamin Casseres, "New York: Matter Triumphalis"

The Empire State, then, is a powerfully [bisociative](#) symbol: Tree of Worlds and the Technological Man, bringer of the new order and destroyer of the old (just as primitive King Kong falls from the Building's pinnacle, slain by technology and love joined). It is also, of course, the Tower, Struck By Lightning (on average, 23 times in any given storm). Not only is it on the street of Babel, but in Illuminati-designed meters it rises to 443: the number of "Bethel," the "House of God" -- the name of the Tower trump in some French Tarot decks. The Tower, of course, is the card of destruction and doom -- but also the kabbalistic path between Netzach and Hod, between the spheres of victory and splendor. Both cup and staff, perfect man and Satanic monster, the building rises at the axis of a symbolic Empire indeed. Perhaps its enigma only be truly captured in the blank smile of Felix the Cat -- the first image broadcast on NBC television, from the top of the Empire State Building, on Yule of 1931. Reach into his bag of tricks, why don't you? It's a magic bag, and it goes all the way down.

Floating on Air

by David Morgan-Mar

Lighter-than-air craft seem to hold a special place in the hearts of gamers. Zeppelins have conjured up grand images of stately travel through the skies, and exciting encounters with Nazis, for many of us. But how many have actually used these vehicles in their games? Zeppelins and their forebears are unfamiliar contraptions to most of us, and few people have any idea where to start adapting such a vehicle for detailed use in a game.

In order to fully appreciate the grand majesty of zeppelins -- and to gain enough understanding to utilize them in games -- it pays to take an historical journey through the events that led to their development and eventual demise. Along the way we shall stop to consider the substantial gaming possibilities present in each stage of the development of lighter-than-air flight.

Balloons

Joseph and Etienne Montgolfier flew the first hot air balloon in Avignon, France, on June 5, 1783. The first manned flight in history took place in Paris on November 21 of the same year. Within a year, balloon ascents had become a popular pastime for the French nobility.

The hydrogen-filled balloon was also demonstrated successfully in 1783, by Professor Jacques Charles of the French Academy of Sciences. The first aerial crossing of the English Channel was performed in a hydrogen balloon in 1785. It had only recently been discovered that hydrogen was lighter than air. The gas was generated by dissolving iron in sulfuric acid, in vast quantities -- 500 pounds of acid and 1000 pounds of iron to produce enough hydrogen to fill a 12-foot diameter balloon. Hydrogen also leaked easily through cloth and the balloon had to be sealed with a thin rubber coating. Later "goldbeater's skin" -- the intestines of oxen -- would be used as a gastight material and after 1800 hydrogen was generated more easily by electrolysis of water.

The inventive mind of man naturally soon put the balloon to use in warfare. The French Revolution (1789-99) saw many opportunities for the use of a Balloon Corps. After some reluctance by commanders to use aerial reconnaissance information (as "unsporting"), tethered observation balloons made helpful contributions to a number of battles. Napoleon was unimpressed however, disbanding the French Balloon Corps in 1802.

The first balloon flight in the USA occurred in 1793, witnessed by President George Washington. Both sides in the US Civil War (1861-65) made use of tethered observation balloons. The Union had a formal balloon corps, enthusiastically supported by Lincoln. The world's first aerial artillery fire occurred in July 1861, with guns mounted in balloons helping defend the besieged suburbs of Washington, D.C. (The first aerial bombing had occurred in 1849, with the Austrian army launching unmanned balloons carrying bombs over Venice. A wind change saw half the bombs land on the Austrians.)

An interesting use of free-flying balloons occurred during the siege of Paris by the Prussians in 1870-71. Cut off from the countryside, the Parisians used hot air balloons to run the blockade, carrying letters and orders to the provinces and

pigeons to fly back to Paris with return correspondence, encoded on microfilm. (Balloon flights back into Paris could not be made due to the unpredictability of the winds.) Sixty-six balloons made the flight during the four month siege, carrying 2.5 million letters and 102 passengers. Two balloons were lost at sea and four were captured by the enemy, but all the rest made it safely, including one which did not land until it reached Norway!

Campaign Use

Although difficult to turn into a campaign because of the one-way nature of the travel, a balloon trip out of besieged Paris in 1870 would make an interesting episode in a campaign set in this turbulent time. A French Revolution or US Civil War campaign could make further use of balloons, with Balloon Corps troops assigned observation or communication missions, with plenty of chances to land behind enemy lines.

For a Cliffhangers-style ballooning campaign, the essential reference is Jules Verne's 1862 novel "Five Weeks in a Balloon." This describes the adventures of an English scientist and two companions in an aerial trip across Africa. The workings of the balloon and the hazards encountered are presented in enough detail to supply a GM with many sessions of adventuring.

For those interested in gaming alternate histories, it is interesting to note that the ingredients used by the Montgolfiers to attain human flight -- namely fire, paper, and cloth -- had been available to civilization for at least 5000 years. Imagine a Nile delta campaign, with observation balloons hovering above the Pyramids spotting the approach of Assyrian war chariots, or the Roman Empire spanned by balloon couriers.

Dirigibles

The biggest problem with balloons is that they are at the mercy of the wind. A free-flying balloon can only travel with the wind, and at the same speed as the wind. Some control can be exercised by manipulating ballast and lifting gas to change altitude and pick up different winds, but this is hardly convenient or reliable.

Floating on Air

Following failed attempts at rowing through the air, or using birds as beasts of burden to pull balloons, it became clear that an engine would be needed to overcome the wind and make a dirigible (or steerable) craft. In 1852 Henri Giffard mounted a special "lightweight" steam engine on a cigar-shaped balloon. The engine weighed 350 pounds (without coal and water) but it produced only 3 horsepower and was insufficient to propel the craft against even the lightest headwind.

In 1897 an interesting attempt at practical dirigibility was made by Salomon Andree. He led an expedition to fly a balloon over the North Pole, twelve years before Peary would succeed in reaching it by foot. Andree's balloon used a dragged rope to slow the balloon below the speed of the wind, and a system of sails could then alter its course by up to thirty degrees. Unfortunately the journey was a failure, with all three men freezing to death after their balloon iced up and could not stay aloft.

The internal combustion engine was invented in 1872 and immediately tried on balloons, but like steam engines it was too heavy to propel an airship. In 1886 Gottlieb Daimler built an engine weighing only 88 pounds per horsepower, initiating a flurry of experimentation. A cash prize was offered to the first person who could fly a round-trip from St. Cloud in Paris to the Eiffel Tower and back, a distance of 7 miles, in 30 minutes. On September 19, 1901, the Brazilian Alberto Santos-Dumont finally claimed the prize after several attempts.

Campaign Use

Aviation from Giffard to Santos-Dumont fits within the Victorian era, a rich background for roleplaying. Victorian horror games or Sherlock Holmes-style investigations might benefit from the occasional adventure involving balloonists. Balloons and dirigibles are a natural feature in Steampunk campaigns. In a Steampunk world where technology has not progressed too far beyond our own Victorian era, scientists, entrepreneurs, and crazed adventurers will naturally seek to experiment with flying machines.

Zeppelins

In Wurttemburg (soon to become part of a united Germany) in 1900, Count Ferdinand von Zeppelin demonstrated his first airship, the *LZ-1*. This ship reached 17 miles per hour in powered flight. Zeppelin's airship design was different to anything flown previously, having a rigid frame with the gasbags held inside. In modern terminology, airships with inflatable gasbags are called blimps, while those with rigid structures are called rigid airships or zeppelins. In between is a semi-rigid airship, with an external gasbag strengthened by a rigid keel. (In *GURPS Vehicles* terms, blimps and semi-rigids are vehicles with external gasbags; zeppelins are vehicles with lifting gas stored in the body.)

Count Zeppelin had become interested in air transport while observing the balloon corps in the US Civil War. Once back in Wurttemburg, Zeppelin had set out to build airships, financed out of his own pocket with help from the Union of German Engineers. Despite the success of the *LZ-1*, his investors were discouraged and Zeppelin was left broke.

Zeppelin began raising money by appealing to the public, and in 1905 the *LZ-2* took to the air. Interest developed and the German army bought *LZ-3* and *LZ-5*. With no other buyers Zeppelin ran into a finance problem. He solved this by starting two companies: Luftschiffbau Zeppelin GmbH in 1908 to build zeppelins; and the Deutsche Luftschiffarhts-Aktien-Gesellschaft (known as DELAG) in 1909 to fly them. DELAG was the world's first commercial airline. By 1914, DELAG had carried 34,028 passengers without injury and flown over 100,000 miles with a fleet of four zeppelins.

Maps for the Graf Zeppelin

- PDF [12k]
- GIF [12k]

Maps for the LZ129 - Hindenburg

- PDF [24k]
- A Deck - GIF [15k]
- B Deck - GIF [11k]
- Overview - GIF [15k]

Campaign Use

The opening years of the 20th century can provide a "magnificent men and their flying machines" background for adventurers. The film of this title can provide background and ideas. The race to become the first to cross the English Channel from France to England (against the wind) could offer a prize large enough to tempt any player characters. Dirigibles could compete on a level footing with early heavier-than-air machines in this era (the Wright Brothers flew at *Kitty Hawk* in 1903), making exciting possibilities for races or competitions between rival groups.

Airships at War

In 1914, Europe suddenly found itself embroiled in war. For some years newspapers and journals had predicted that dirigible airpower would be extremely useful, if not decisive, in a war. Military commanders disagreed; for several months the full potential of both airships and airplanes was left unused.

With fighting on the ground in France, England dispatched all of her fledgling airplane division across the Channel in support. Air defence was utterly non-existent. When it became clear to the German commanders that the war would not be won before winter set in, they urged Kaiser Wilhelm II to authorize zeppelin bombing raids on Paris and London. Wilhelm resisted, clinging to the 19th century idea of "civilized" warfare and believing aerial bombing of cities to be unchivalrous.

With the war going badly against Germany, Wilhelm finally agreed in January 1915 to allow bombing of military targets. The army and navy ordered new airships and Luftschiffbau Zeppelin began turning them out at a rate of two per month.

Early raids on English ports were hampered by navigational difficulty. The zeppelins flew at night, with no moon, for surprise and concealment, and were guided more by the instinct of the navigator than anything else. By May, Kaiser Wilhelm allowed bombing of London, but maintained a strict proscription against targeting historic buildings and especially Buckingham Palace. Cities were easier targets, since a policy of darkening lights had not been enacted.

By the end of 1915, 208 British had been killed by zeppelin bombers, with no German losses. In 1916, the Germans intended to do much more damage and break the will of the English. The bombings hardened the resolve of the defenders, however, and improved airplanes with incendiary ammunition flew to intercept the zeppelins.

Despite being filled with flammable hydrogen, zeppelins were difficult to shoot down, even with incendiary bullets. Pure hydrogen does not burn -- it must be mixed with air first. The normal result of shooting at a zeppelin was a slowly leaking gasbag, which would not hinder its mission in the slightest. Sustained incendiary fire at a single hull location was necessary to ignite the gas. By the end of 1916 the British pilots had the technique, and zeppelins played no further significant part in the war.

Attempts were made in 1917 by zeppelin squadrons to fly as high as 20,000 feet, well above the ceiling of the British airplanes. The thin air, cold, and unpredictable high winds at this altitude made these operations untenable, and none were successful.

Campaign Use

With all this activity, it is easy to work airships into a World War I campaign. The Germans were not the only ones using lighter-than-air craft in the war. The British built over 200 blimps, using them with great success in naval convoys to detect submarines and as coastal patrols. The Italian army used blimps for reconnaissance and bombing support of ground troops. Almost any action of the war could be the stage for adventure involving airships.

After the War

The 1920s and '30s were the golden age of lighter-than-air travel. Many military rigid airships were flown, including: The British R-series, numbered intermittently from *R.28* up to *R.80*; the US Navy's *Shenandoah*, *Los Angeles*, *Akron*, and *Macon*; and a handful of ex-German zeppelins given to France and Italy as war reparations. Germany was prohibited from building new zeppelins of its own until 1925 by the Treaty of Versailles.

By 1920, there had been a few accidents involving the burning of the hydrogen lifting gas of an airship. The USA had recently begun producing helium, at a cost nearly ten times that of hydrogen. Public outcries after the loss of the *R.38* and Italy's *Roma* resulted in the US Navy thereafter only using helium as its lifting gas. Helium was treated as a military commodity and not exported from the USA; all other countries had to make do with hydrogen.

This was the age in which airships made epic journeys. In 1926 the Norwegian semi-rigid *Norge* made a flight over the North Pole. The *Graf Zeppelin* topped even this, flying around the world in 1929. This trip took just 12 days and carried paying passengers, years before the first torturously slow intercontinental commercial airplane flights. It followed a successful regular passenger service between Germany and the USA and Brazil. The new director of Luftschiffbau Zeppelin, Dr Hugo Eckener, held high hopes for financing a huge commercial zeppelin fleet.

The stock market crash of 1929 and the Depression killed any hope of Eckener's dreams being realized. The British Government, however, had recently completed two passenger airships, the *R.100* and *R.101*. Each could carry 100 passengers, but it soon became clear the *R.101* was flawed and did not have enough lift. While it was cut in half and lengthened to add another gasbag, the *R.100* made a return flight to Canada. The newly lengthened *R.101* began a trip to India in *1930*, but crashed disastrously in France, ending British airship development. The *R.100* was dismantled

without flying again.

The next German zeppelin was not built until 1936, funded by the Nazi Government. It was named the Hindenburg. To Dr Eckener's disgust, the Nazis used the new ship for propaganda purposes. She dropped leaflets during the 1936 referendum and made a fly-past at the Berlin Olympic Games with swastikas adorning her tailfins.

After the referendum approved the German annexation of the Rhineland, the Hindenburg made several passenger flights from Frankfurt to Rio de Janeiro and Lakehurst, New Jersey, in 1936-37. Her most infamous flight ended in fiery destruction at Lakehurst on May 6, 1937. The disaster, in which 36 died but 62 on board survived, was the beginning of the end for the airship era.

The *Graf Zeppelin II*, under construction when the *Hindenburg* burned, was quickly modified to use helium instead of hydrogen. Eckener appeared before a Senate Committee in Washington to plead the case for the USA to export helium. Convinced, Congress and President F.D. Roosevelt agreed to let Eckener have the helium. Hitler had plans of his own, however. With the *Anschluss* in Austria in 1938, the USA froze exports to Germany. Eckener again pleaded with the US Government, but this time could not convince them that helium would not be used for war.

By 1939, the *Graf Zeppelin II*, filled with hydrogen, was indeed being used for military purposes. She flew spy missions outside Germany and even flew over Scotland once. When World War II began, Hermann Goering put all his faith in the Luftwaffe and ordered both *Graf Zeppelin*s dismantled and used to build airplanes. Thus ended the era of the zeppelin.

Campaign Use

The years between the World Wars are the usual setting for Cliffhangers adventuring in the best *Indiana Jones* spirit. With plenty of exotic locations around the world being opened up for travel, and modes of travel as glamorous as zeppelins and ocean liners, the possibilities are limitless.

South America makes a perfect setting for Cliffhanging adventure, with impenetrable jungles and mysterious mountains inhabited by fierce natives and creatures. Lost cities full of treasure or isolated plateaus populated by dinosaurs are obvious goals, and what better expedition vehicle than the *Graf Zeppelin* or *Hindenburg*, berthed at Rio de Janeiro and only awaiting an encounter with Nazis to arrange a "loan."

Horror games can also use this time period effectively. Hitler's fascination with the occult is well-known. What if a Nazi expedition to America is returning to Germany with a collection of dusty tomes and grimoires found in old university libraries and, halfway across the Atlantic in the Hindenburg, crew and passengers on the PCs' flight start disappearing? A zeppelin makes a good setting for action, being large enough to hide all manner of menaces, but fragile and claustrophobic enough to cause panic at the slightest whiff of brimstone . . .

Following this line of thought, a passenger zeppelin flight can be treated as an ultimate "locked room" for murder mysteries in Agatha Christie "Ten Little Indians" and "Murder on the Orient Express" style.

In Alternate Earths games, zeppelins can come into their own. We can all imagine a world in which the Hindenburg never crashed, but what if *Wall Street* never crashed in 1929? By 1938 there could have been scores of large passenger zeppelins plying the skies -- and giving passenger ocean liners a run for their money. The Depression was also a factor in bringing the Nazis to power, so the American reluctance to part with helium may never have developed, and safe helium airships would have ushered in a golden age of technology through a war-free 1940s.

Time Travel campaigns also have plenty of uses for zeppelins. These range from the almost cliched "save the *Hindenburg*/make sure the *Hindenburg* burns" missions to subtle interventions with the Nazis or even the British or US Navies. On a different tack, a suitably equipped airship makes a good time vehicle, capable of travelling over Jurassic plains or of observing the Battle of Agincourt from a discrete altitude.

Technical Details

Provided with this article are PDF format files containing deck plans of the passenger areas of the *Graf Zeppelin* and *Hindenburg*. These are the most likely airships to appear as passenger carriers in games, so this section will concentrate on pertinent statistics of these two ships. Similar fictional ships can of course be based on these two.

The frame of each ship was built of duralumin, a strong but light aluminum and copper alloy. The spidery network of duralumin girders was covered with an outer skin of doped cotton cloth. The bulk of the hull was filled with large bags to hold gas, made of goldbeater's skin in the *Graf Zeppelin*, and of cloth coated with an impermeable gelatin solution in the *Hindenburg*.

The *Graf Zeppelin* used Blaugas as fuel -- this is a gaseous fuel with the same density as air. It filled nearly a quarter of the hull, but had the advantage that the ship's buoyancy did not change as it used fuel. The Hindenburg used diesel fuel, and had to deal with increased buoyancy as it burned it. Electrical power for lighting, radio, and cooking was produced by a small wind turbine on the *Graf Zeppelin*, and by diesel generators on the *Hindenburg*.

The passenger areas of the *Graf Zeppelin* were all inside the large gondola, attached below the main hull of the ship. The front of the gondola was the bridge and command areas. In the *Hindenburg*, the gondola was much smaller and contained only the bridge and controls. The passenger areas were inside the hull itself, where more room was available. The crew had small cabins in the main hull in both ships.

Although the hull was mostly full of gas, there was a system of catwalks and ladders around and between the gasbags, allowing the crew to reach most parts of the ship. The engines on each zeppelin (5 on the *Graf*, 4 on the *Hindenburg*) were housed in pods outside the hull, and crew could climb out of the hull and into the pods in flight to work on them.

During flight, the crew were kept busy performing engine maintenance and checking gasbags and the hull for damage caused by turbulence. They wore felt covered shoes to avoid striking sparks on the metal catwalks. Tears in the cloth of the hull or tailfins often had to be repaired in flight, with crew climbing about over the surface of the ship tethered by ropes.

As could be imagined, smoking on board the hydrogen-filled *Graf Zeppelin* was strictly forbidden. Surprisingly though, both the *R.101* and the *Hindenburg* had smoking rooms for the convenience of passengers. The *Hindenburg*'s was lined with asbestos and accessible only through an airlock arrangement of doors designed to stop embers.

Indiana Jones notwithstanding, German zeppelins never carried airplanes. The *USS Akron* and *USS Macon*, however, carried squadrons of three *F9C-2 Sparrowhawk* biplanes, which could be both launched and captured in flight using a specially designed trapeze-hook apparatus. It was a delicate operation requiring experienced pilots, but never caused any problems.

Over the 1936 flying season, the *Hindenburg* averaged 65 hours from Friedrichshafen, Germany, to Lakehurst, New Jersey, and 50 hours on the return journey. The difference is due to the easterly prevailing winds. A return ticket from Lakehurst to Friedrichshafen cost $720 for a single berth in a twin-share cabin, or $1,350 for a whole cabin. A one-way ticket cost $400.

Controlling an Airship

The primary consideration for RPG characters who might need to control an airship is lift. In order to climb, the ship must drop ballast; in order to drop it must vent lifting gas. The amount of water carried as ballast was plenty for routine operations, but could be stretched on long voyages with bad weather.

Elevators on the tailfins could be used to attain a small degree of dynamic lift or dive. A rudder provided steering control. These were important for navigation of course, but gas and ballast control were crucial in keeping the ship in the air.

As an airship rises, it moves into lower pressure air and the gas in its bags expands. This provides more lift and gas

must be vented once the desired cruising altitude is attained. If gas is not vented, the gasbags may distend and rupture. To initiate another climb, ballast is dropped.

The reverse holds for dropping in altitude. A drop is initiated by venting gas. As the ship drops into denser air, its lifting gas contracts and provides less lift, so ballast must be dropped to slow or halt the fall.

Beyond these intricacies, zeppelin controllers must also deal with weather. Hot air is less dense and provides less lift than cold air, so less of a load can be carried over hot terrain than in colder regions. Air is generally warmer over land than oceans too, because of solar heating. Crossing a weather front into colder or warmer air can start rapid climbs or falls, respectively. And gusts of wind can buffet an airship as much as any modern airliner suffers from turbulence.

Perhaps surprisingly, hydrogen-filled airships also routinely flew through thunderstorms, and were struck by lightning. Only three airships ever burned in mid-air. Two of those had been venting gas when struck by lightning and Hugo Eckener strongly suspected the third had also ignited under the same conditions. His crews flew with a strict order never to vent gas in a thunderstorm, and none of his ships ever had a problem with lightning.

Experienced airshipmen could deal with all these events routinely, though serious weather could certainly cause some anxious moments. Despite the Hindenburg disaster, airship travel remains to this day the safest long-range transport in terms of fatalities per passenger-mile. The *Graf Zeppelin* flew over a million miles without a single injury. Recreating this sort of travel in a roleplaying game should be both an interesting and exciting adventure.

Ship	*Graf Zeppelin*	*Hindenburg*	R.100	R.101**
Year built	1928	1936	1929	1930
Length	775 feet	804 feet	709 feet	777 feet
Diameter	100 feet	135 feet	130 feet	131 feet
Cruising speed	73 mph	78 mph	64 mph	48 mph
Top speed	80 mph	84 mph	81 mph	71 mph
Range	8400 miles	8420 miles	3500 miles	3500 miles
Weight	61 tons	130 tons	102 tons	113 tons
Aerostatic lift	94 tons	240 tons	156 tons	166 tons
Fuel	0 tons*	64 tons	34 tons	25 tons
Water ballast	10 tons	16 tons	10 tons	8 tons
Passengers	20	50	100	100
Crew	43	62	48	42
Cost (US$)	$1 million	$2.2 million	$1.75 million	$2.5 million

* Effectively -- Blaugas fuel with same density as air.
** After modification.

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(Thanks to Tracy Ratcliff for proofreading and fact checking.)

by SwiftOne

Art colored by Keith Johnson

Having miniature heroes be the little fish in a big, **big** pond is nothing new; literature and movies have shown us hundreds of ways to go about it. Odds are, however, that you've never tried it in your roleplaying. Here are a collection of tips and notes on how to run an adventure or a campaign that lets your players face problems of an entirely new scale. Any stats given reference *GURPS*, but the concepts can be applied to most any game or genre.

An ultra-small PC game can turn ordinary tasks into extraordinary ones, and create adventure out of the mundane. It can be used to lower the power tone of the campaign (Bjorn the demigod, Terror of the Kaldath Plains and Conqueror of the Byanta Peaks, now must make his way across the village) or to introduce epic tasks into an otherwise commonplace situation (the room Nelson once knew as the Kitchen has become a vast realm with sheer cliffs, rats that could bite him in half, invincible cockroaches, and at times, a feline of inconceivable size.)

Ultra-small games are, for the purposes of this article, defined as having PC's with an average height of no more than 6 inches, and no less than 1/2 inch (any larger and the focus of the campaign will be different, and any smaller and interaction with non-microscopic portions of the real world is too difficult.

Sizing Them Up

A GM should carefully consider the effects of the selected scale before deciding. For example, a 3-inch tall character can wield a sewing needle as a sword, have a walking stride of around 1/2 inch, and can ride a mouse (assuming you can find a willing mouse), while a 1-inch tall character can use a needle as a spear, runs to keep up with a 3-inch character, and is a good-sized cat treat. Selecting the scale of your campaign will decide how your players view the real world and how it interacts with them. Whether a wasp is the relative size of a cat or a house makes a very big difference. Points to consider when setting the scale:

- *Relative size of creatures:* rats, mice, spiders, insects, cats, dogs, etc.
- *Interactions with humans:* A 6-incher is unmistakable, while a 1/2-incher is easily overlooked.
- *Interactions with terrain:* A 6-incher faces long distances and obstacles, but for a 1/2-incher seams, cables, and twigs become the terrain itself.

Once the GM has decided what scale to play at, (s)he needs to decide how the players will become this scale. There are numerous scientific difficulties with being small (see **GURPS Biotech** [BIO33, sidebar] for details), so it is best to ignore science for the most part. Ways to do this include:

- **It's Just The Way Life Is.** Just like Mary Norton's Borrowers, or Swift's Lilliputians, the characters' race is just naturally this size. Naturally this is usually only appropriate for an ultra-small campaign, rather than just an adventure. A variation on this is to be playing a very small race, such as the Ellyllon of **GURPS Fantasy Folk** (FF54), or the Cidi of **GURPS Aliens** (A40).
- **Abracadabra.** The Shrink and Shrink Other spells (G18-19) can perform exactly what is needed, and can be done on a temporary or permanent basis. These spells require a large amount of mana, however, so the GM will have to have an explanation ready. A **GURPS Technomancer** campaign can use this as an opportunity to combine magic, technology, *and* the ultra-small.
- **Whoops.** Alternatively, the shrinking can be the result of a critical magical failure, and be of whatever duration the GM prefers. The GM should be careful not to ruin the flow of an adventure by suddenly shrinking the party without a clear concept of how to keep it interesting rather than frustrating.
- **Things Man Was Not Meant To Know.** The characters could be suffering from a powerful curse. This can lead to attempting a quest to restore themselves, but quests are a bit more involved when you can't wrap your arms around a sword handle, much less your hands.
- **It's not *me*.** The characters could be visiting somewhere (dimension, plane, beanstalk, planet, whatever) where everything else is much larger. Most of the rule options presented in here won't apply (or will apply in reverse to the large creatures).
- **The Incredible Shrinking Man.** The characters could simply be slowly, inexplicably shrinking, in defiance of science. This allows you to sidestep many of the science problems (after all, the scientists are baffled), and allows for some preparation by the characters while they are still large. It also means that the GM has to arrange for surprises because the characters are prepared, and are unlikely to be venturing into mouseholes without a good reason.
- **Igor, I've Done It!** Weird Science can explain anything, and a shrinking machine is par for the course in the lab of any self-respecting mad scientist. The characters can be shrunk as part of a mission ("Retrieve my lost microchip from the bee hive in the walls before my reactor hits meltdown!"), as punishment ("So Agent Steele, you thought you could outsmart me, did you? Now we'll see if your even smart enough to survive a rat maze . . . along with a few hungry rats!") or by accident ("Igor, did you leave the Shrinko-Dinko Ray on? For Shame! Where are those assistants anyways?").
- **Please Report Any Unusual Side Effects.** A variant on the Weird Science theme, this explanation has the shrinking as a result of some critical failure. Philadelphia Experiment, Hyperspace Jump failure, or whatever, it has left the characters with a small problem.
- **I'm Just Visiting.** The characters aren't really shrunk, they are simply inhabiting small bodies (Animals? Aliens? Gene-crafted hosts? Miniature androids?) via magic, psionics, or science. Usually such characters will have a specific goal that they need to accomplish, since this method usually involves some preparation and conscious choice.
- **Welcome to Nimh.** The characters aren't human, but small anthropomorphic animals. This can be combined with **GURPS Bunnies and Burrows**, or simply run on your own. Usually something has to threaten the characters home to drive them into the realm of full size people, but not necessarily.

The Natives Are Getting Restless

All characters have motivations, and adventures normally draw on those to ensure that the players have a good time. Players can be frustrated if their characters are too small to do much, so the GM should make sure that the adventure isn't just a delay in the normal adventure for the players. For campaigns that are ultra-small, this is less of a problem, as the GM can simply design normal games around the goals and obstacles of the smaller world. For adventures in a campaign that find the characters suddenly reduced, the characters are likely to have a different set of goals and difficulties. Here are some common themes throughout the ultra-small genre:

- **I Won't Grow Up.** The characters want to be restored to full size, and are either seeking to learn how to do so,

or to implement their knowledge. The GM should be sure to keep hope alive with the players, by offering the characters some clue that restoration is possible, and some idea of how to discover it.

- **I Have Plans For You.** The characters need to avoid a full-size person who seeks them for some reason (be it a scientist trying to study them or a giant trying to eat them.) The GM usually has to make sure that the enemy reveals his strategies and plans before confronting the characters, because a full-size NPC can usually ignore the struggles and escape attempts of ultra-small characters. The characters will need to use their ability to be overlooked to their advantage. A variant of this theme is to avoid discovery (not only capture) while accomplishing some other goal.
- **No Fluffy, No!** Friendly animals and minor pests can become useful allies or terrifying monsters. Entire societies that most people are normally ignorant of become significant. Interesting critters include ants, spiders, caterpillars, cockroaches, bees, flies, butterflys, mice, rats, bats, birds, cats and dogs. This can also lead to some humorous activities once the characters are restored (igniting an ant colony or adopting the mutt).
- **What A Long Strange Trip It's Been.** The characters often have to cross a vast distance that was once an easy and familiar route. This allows the GM to entertain the players with new exciting descriptions of routine areas. A sandbox becomes a desert, a puddle a sea, and a lawn a jungle.
- **Capture The Flag.** The characters have to find something or someone, usually something appropriate to their size. The GM needs to be careful to make the object findable, and to keep the characters aware that it is. A directional indicator is great for such a task (keeping distance unknown only adds to mystery).
- **The Clock Is Ticking.** A final common theme in ultra-small settings is a time limit. The characters have to accomplish their goal in a certain amount of time or something dire will happen (the world will blow up, the change becomes permanent, or little Timmy dies). The GM should make sure the characters do not lose hope too early as a result of serious mistakes, and should keep the time limit long enough to allow adventures and side-tracking, but short enough to keep the sense of urgency.

Cinematic Effects

One interesting effect of being ultra-small is that relatively large falls do not produce large amounts of damage. Your falling velocity (ignoring air resistance) does not change based on your mass, but the energy involved in impact does. For simplicity, the GM can simply assign normal falling damage, *ignoring scale*. Thus a 1-inch character falling 3 yards would suffer the normal 3d-9 damage that a full-size character would. GMs that find this too generous can give the damage a multiplier, or modify the scale of the damage chart (feet instead of yards, for example). Regardless, falling shouldn't hurt as much when you are ultra-small. Of course, characters don't have to know this is how it works. This rule doesn't apply to characters who are normal size in a very large world; however, dire things happen to full-size creatures that fall in that world.

Ants and related insects can lift many times their own weight. While people (big or small) aren't built like ants, it can be a fun cinematic rule to ignore science and say that ultra-small characters have relative super-strength. Because of their size, this means they aren't throwing cars around, but that they can throw things the relative size of cars. Likewise, the characters can be gifted with extreme jumping abilities, such as those possessed by many species of spiders and small animals.

Of course, even if a character is smaller, that doesn't mean everything works smaller. Take fire, for example. Matches make inappropriate torches because they'll burn out just as quickly regardless of the size of the user. (Note, however, that glowing embers are much more useful to an ultra-small character than to a full-size character. Note also that small embers can go out very easily.) The GM can use such differences as mental challenges to the players, or can ignore them in favor of game flow.

When dealing with full size opponents, the players should be threatened with defeat rather than death. Creatures the size of insects rarely pose much of a threat to the average person, and anything that started trouble would be quickly squashed. Rather than being killed as realism would dictate, the character should be bowled over, captured, swallowed alive (and remain alive), and/or moved somewhere other than where they wanted to be. If the players start to take unfair advantage of this, however, they become fair game.

For full size creatures, use the stats of similarly large creatures from *GURPS Basic*, *Bestiary*, *Fantasy Bestiary*, *Space Bestiary*, or *Dinosaurs*. Note that *GURPS Bunnies and Burrows* has an extensive listing of "normal" creatures with their stats adjusted relative to a rabbit-sized creature. Humans can be treated as strong but slow, as giants are treated in *GURPS Fantasy Folk* (FF82).

Just a Litle Magic

Any campaign that includes psionics or magic will have to decide how to resolve their effects against full-size opponents. They can work as normal, which will lead to very powerful (as far as the full-size creatures are concerned) players, or they can they can work only on creatures near the characters' size. This can be an absolute rule, or the GM can rule that larger targets require more energy, as if the spell were an area effect spell that must affect the entire size of the creature (remember that a hex is a smaller unit when one is a smaller character). An interesting variation is to allow powers to affect mental conditions regardless of scale, but cause physical effects relative to the characters' scale. Another interesting variation is to introduce magic into a campaign where it is normally *not* present. After all, the world as a whole might by a low mana area, but who knew the inside of trees/animal burrows/whatever was a high mana area?

Micro Machines

Ultra-small characters in need of equipment obviously can't just drop by the local corner store for supplies. Even if they can get there, it's unlikely such a shop will have a 1/2 inch (long) wrench. That's why ultra-small characters have two friends: The toy store, and the Gadgeteer.

Your basic toys lack functionality, but more and more modern toys include all sorts of interesting features. Radio control, motorized moving parts, and those spring-loaded missile launchers that may actually seem threatening to creatures the size of a paper-clip. Construction toys such as Erector sets, Legos, or others offer nearly unlimited opportunities.

A Gadgeteer loves a toy store, but can produce a miniature equivalent of just about any full-size equipment given enough trash to scrounge. Vehicles can be constructed of bottles, pencils, and string. Weapons are made from paper-clips and rubber bands. The various bits and discards of full-size life become much more useful when you are on their scale. Ultra-small Gadgeteers love finding the various odds and ends that have ended up under furniture, beneath the floors, or trapped in other small areas.

Gear and Equipment by the Lowest Bidder

Much of a ultra-small campaign will revolve around the acquisition of the gear necessary to accomplish goals. The GM should have some idea of what level of gear to allow before beginning the game. If the characters are converted to a smaller size, does their gear transform with them? If it does, most players will have their characters gather equipment before hand, and even if they can't, they are often prepared for most eventualities (who has need of a needle-sword when their trusty magical flaming sword shrank with them?). If their gear does not transform, the characters will have to be concerned with not only the tools to accomplish their goals, but also very basic needs of shelter and protection (imagine the chagrin of mighty adventurers that have to raid a Barbie dollhouse for clothes!).

Here is a short list of suggestions for some improvisational weapons and gear. In extended campaigns, players should be encouraged to construct working versions of the gear their characters will wield. (Disclaimer: If a player pokes someones eye out while demonstrating a paperclip/rubber band bow-and-arrow, neither the author nor *Pyramid* is responsible!) The suggestions below should be used as appropriate for the characters' height.

> **String/Cord** (for lassos, bolas, nets, etc)
> **Pencils** (as spears, quarterstaff)
> **CD's** (as shields)

Pin Buttons (as shields)
Shirt Buttons (shields, guard on a weapon, sewn to cloth for armor)
Thimble (helmet)
Paperclip (mancatcher, straightened for javelin)
Staple (straightened for dagger)
Needle (spearhead, arrow, sword, dagger)
Toothpicks (arrows, javelins)
Twist-ties (can be shaped into armor)
Matches (flaming arrows)
Rubber Band (sling, used with paperclip to make bow, several in combination with some pencils can make a good catapult)
Marbles (as ammo, or as mace head)
Never underestimate the usefulness of **superglue**

These are just a few suggestions. Try opening a desk drawer and seeing what imaginative ideas are summoned. Give your players freedom to experiment and create.

How To Have Fun On Only Two Inches A Day

A creative GM can use the material above to come up with endless adventures and plots, but here are a few adventure seeds to get started with. These seeds can be modified in many ways to create a wide variety of campaigns.

- **Stopping Dr. Badd.** The Agents break into Dr. Badd's secret lab to investigate rumors of his dastardly deeds. Not only do they discover that the rumors are true, but he plans to unleash his revenge on the world very soon! Before the Agents can grab him and foil his scheme, they get shrunk down by one of his traps. Now they have to traverse his lab and stop his plans while only a few inches tall. Even if they're successful, they are still shrunk, and Dr. Badd never figured out how to reverse the process. If they get in touch with their agency, they'll be told to continue to monitor the Doctor's actions in secret.
- **One Ring to Rule Them.** Legend says that the long lost Ring of Aldarus can identify the true heir to the throne. Now that the king is on his deathbed, and the barons are gathering armies, it is essential to find it. It is said that it was stolen by the shadow lizards that live in tunnels beneath the castle . . . very small tunnels.
- **Alien Nation.** The recent Xyrgrn-Dylar alliance has the Terran Alliance concerned. The Defense AI wants to have a fly on the wall of their next conference. Security is too tight to slip an agent in, and droids lack the adaptive intelligences. No alien race has even been able to prevent rats (or the equivalent), so the players are going to be uploaded into a set of robotic miniatures, and led to where they can hop on board a shuttle headed to the appropriate space station. The players will have to dodge security, automated defenses, and of course, space rats, and still listen in on the meetings.
- **Pardon Me Your Highness.** It has been known since 1817 that bees produce royal jelly, which can turn a bee larvae into a queen larvae. It wasn't until now that it was realized that royal jelly is a powerful anti-agathic. It can't be synthesized, and must be used almost immediately to work, so the rich and powerful hire teams to accompany them into the hive where they can get their dose direct. The bees normally ignore human intruders, unless provoked, so it's reasonably safe. Of course, the rich are terribly vulnerable while wandering about a hive, and their foes aren't above sending in their own miniature teams in to assassinate the target and anyone who gets in the way, introducing more aggressive species of bees, or arranging for lab accidents.
- **Heart of Darkness.** The characters have gotten themselves shrunk in the wilderness, with nothing to do about it except survive six months until help arrives (or the process "wears off"). The characters have little equipment, and will have to adapt their skills towards a wilderness outlook. It's Swiss Family Robinson meets Tom Thumb.
- **Foreign Bodies.** The characters are shrunk and inserted into a full-size entity's body. This usually requires a scale smaller than most ultra-small games, as it deals with things on the microscopic level, but not necessarily: They could be inserted into something larger. This can be as simple in concept as traveling into the Space Whale's stomach to retrieve the beacon, or as complicated as navigating your sub through blood vessels, fleeing the representatives of the immune system. Read Asimov's *Fantastic Voyage* and *Fantastic Voyage II* (which was more under his control) for inspiration.

- **Little Endians.** The characters are part of a race of small people, who live by stealing from Bigguns. Unfortunately, not everyone of this race agrees on different philosophical viewpoints, and several factions are constantly warring. The characters will have to survive the normal dangers of being a hidden Littleun, as well defend themselves from others like them. This campaign can combine elements of politics, trade, piracy, adventure, and theft.

Obligatory Puns

An ultra-small campaign can give your players a whole new outlook on matters, and can provoke them to new heights (hah!) of creativity and ingenuity. The GM can discover that adventures and epic tales flow easily when something as simple as a large tree becomes a vast realm full of different lifeforms and peril. A game of small characters need not be a minor matter.

by C. A. Johnson

Art by Dan Smith

A group of people takes their seats around the desk of the mission coordinator at Whitehall. Looking briefly at each of them, the grim-faced man behind the desk reaches into a drawer, pulls out a set of colored, unmarked file folders, and hands them out to each person. "I don't need to tell you that this information doesn't leave this facility," he says matter-of-factly. "You'll check those folders at the door before you leave." The acknowledgment is universal and automatic as the group opens the files and scans the summary page.

"We may have a problem with an ongoing mission," the nameless coordinator states. "A number of bodies have turned up in an Ohio suburb. There is no known link between the victims. Cause of death has been murder, but the method has varied in each case. You have summaries of the police reports in your files. There are two things that really concern us here. First, there's the frequency of the attacks. Statistically, the murder rate in that area has trebled in the last month. Secondly, in each case, the attack has been quick, brutal, professional, and had a near total absence of evidence left behind. Remind you of something?"

One of the listeners speaks. "Sounds like a clean-up."

"Exactly. However, in no case can the Company trace any leaks to these individuals, even in our most paranoid projections." That raises a few eyebrows in the room. The personnel at Whitehall make paranoia their stock and trade. They, as are all departments of the Company, are obscenely good at their jobs. "Ordinarily, we'd chalk this up to a fluke, or some clever serial killer, and leave it to the authorities to handle . . ."

"Except for that ongoing mission you mentioned," the same listener fills in.

"Correct. The Company has a long-term surveillance in progress in that area. You have the mission briefing, all relevant reports, and the squad portfolios in your mission packets. Department specific information has been provided where appropriate. Our worst case scenario is that one of our operatives has cracked. Best case is that serial killer I mentioned earlier.

"I'm not going to lie to you, people. This is the most dangerous type of Security mission there is. You're going undercover against our own. If there is a secret here to be found, there is no one on this planet better trained to keep it and eliminate the individuals trying to ferret it out. If our worst fears are realized, your orders are to neutralize the threat without jeopardizing the existing mission or the conspiracy. You have the authority to abort that mission should you see a need. Speaking as the man who set it up, you better have a damned good reason if you do abort. The reports were just starting to show progress. If we had to back out now, it would take months to get back into the position we're in now. Given our position in this war, it may be months we can't spare.

"I want a mission synopsis on my desk in seventy-two hours. You have ninety-six hours after that to requisition your equipment. From that point on, I expect nothing other then results. Is that clear?"

Everyone else in the room nods silently.

"Are there any questions?"

"Sir?" the only other person to speak so far says, "Why the codename? Why Ravenheart?"

The mission coordinator locks eyes with the speaker. "Because one way or another, there's a black-hearted bastard behind this. Your job is to find out if he's ours or not. Anything else?"

Silence answers.

"Excellent. Dismissed."

Briefing File

Operation: Ravenheart

Mission Synopsis: Imagitech Surveillance.

Mission statement: Investigate the possibility of Grey involvement with the technical aspects of Imagitech Inc. Determine the extent of any such involvement. Report back to the Company on any findings.

Corporate Profile: Imagitech Engineering

Imagitech Engineering is a relatively new company entering the lucrative video game market. Herman Gander incorporated it a mere four years ago. They specialize in easily portable personal entertainment units, similar to the popular "Gamebuddy" line in size. Company growth started slowly, as they attempted to get product recognition. Two years ago, the main product of the company took a radical upswing in quality and presentation, utilizing graphics of near photographic quality in a unit the size of a sophisticated market available graphic calculator.

Less than a year after that, Imagitech began to enter bids on government contracts; specifically, contracts for training simulators utilizing VR technology. This is what earned them the scrutiny of the Company.

Imagitech's financial footing is relatively firm for a company of its age. Sales of their

flagship product have secured a solid base in the marketplace, and show no signs of slowing down. With the additional revenues from the contracts mentioned above, Imagitech stands to turn a thirty million dollar profit next quarter. Projections for the following quarter almost double.

Analysis of Imagitech's PlayPal yielded some unexpected results. The central processing chip is extremely complex, capable of running hundreds of thousands, perhaps even millions more operations per second than required by the games themselves. Considering the quality of the graphics, this is a very impressive number indeed. The chip seems to have a self-limiting structure, in that it appears to be hardwired to run much slower than it is capable of.

Most impressive of all, even the Tech department has so far been unable to replicate or reprogram these chips.

Personnel Briefs:

- **Bill:** Intelligence department.
  Specific expertise: Covert entry and surveillance techniques. First mission.
  Pre-Academy history: Art thief involved in several high profile thefts.
  Academy history: Swimmer, excelled in chess, drafted early by his department of choice. Excelled in intrusion and social training. Struggled with combat.
  Profile: Early thirties, 5'7" tall, Caucasian. Hair usually blonde, eyes naturally green. Suave and smooth, even for a spook. Prefers hands-on work, but highly expert in long range surveillance techniques.
- **Larry:** Intelligence department.
  Specific expertise: Corporate espionage techniques. Veteran of nine missions. Designated mission commander.
  Pre-Academy history: Freelance corporate espionage operative.
  Academy history: Rugby player, moderately good at chess. Placed about a third of the way through the draft by second choice. First was Security. Displayed general competence, but excelled in corporate infiltration. Weak in the science fields, from a Company viewpoint.
  Profile: Mid thirties, 6'1" tall, Caucasian. Prefers brown or auburn hair, eyes are naturally brown. Quietly competent and self-assured, he volunteers nothing, ever.
  Mission summaries: Two Cover-ups, both successful. Three Discovery missions, with one aborted by Secop, and one partial failure. One Bug Hunt, successful. Three Recon missions against corporate targets, all successful.
- **John:** Security department.
  Specific expertise: None. Veteran of seven missions.
  Pre-Academy history: Graduated MIT with Electronic Engineering and History degrees. Leftist politics led him to life as political activist, then low profile terrorist. Contacted after first international job.
  Academy history: Struggled a bit with some of the academic work. Excelled in survival and weeding drills. Rugby player, not an exceptional chess player. Good at Go. Drafted late by third choice. First two were Tech and Combat. John is known to have exceptional sensory abilities, notably scent and hearing.
  Profile: Amerindian, 5' 11" tall. Dark hair. Eyes naturally black.
  Mission Summaries: Two Recon missions, one successful, one aborted. Two Clean-ups, both successful. One Containment mission, aborted. Two Cover-ups, both successful.
- **Gina:** Tech department.
  Specific expertise: Entertainment systems. Veteran of three missions.
  Pre-Academy history: Self educated hacker and gamer. An Op squad caught her

when she found and attempted to enter a Blacknet node. Seeing her potential, they let her go with a cover story and kept her under surveillance. She was recruited two years later.

Academy History: Swimmer, with a keen mind for academic work. She was widely skilled as a side effect of her gaming days. Excelled in chess. Drafted at once by her department of choice.

Profile: Caucasian, 5'4", naturally blonde, eyes naturally blue.

Mission summaries: One Containment mission, successful. One Cover-up mission, successful. One Discovery mission, failed.

- **Sarah:** Tech department.

Specific expertise: Electronics engineering and manufacturing techniques. Veteran of five missions.

Pre-Academy history: A brilliant engineering student out of Cal-Tech with looks to match her mind, Sarah was contacted indirectly almost at once after her graduation. Her job at Dynatronics convinced the Company she was worth having.

Academy history: Brilliant academic work, but struggled a bit in the field as her expectations caught up with her natural talent. Swimmer, top of her class at chess. Top pick of her class for her department of choice.

Profile: African American, 5'6", prefers golden or lightened hair, eyes naturally dark brown.

Mission summaries: One Discovery, successful. One Containment, successful. Two cover-ups, successful. One Clean-up, successful.

Preliminary scenario: After due consideration of personnel and the situation, the consensus of the squad is to insert Gina as a testing engineer. Offering one of the existing Imagitech personnel a position at Dynatronics can easily create the necessary opening. Once in, Gina can plant evidence of corporate espionage on one of the senior engineers. Larry will provide the necessary evidence and coordinate placement of it. This will allow placement of Sarah in the upper echelon of the engineering staff. John will insure that other applicants do not take or are not eligible for the position. Bill will maintain active surveillance on squad members and on any other people deemed necessary by the situation and the squad. From this point in the operation on, Gina is superfluous in her cover, and can pursue a more aggressive intelligence gathering agenda with minimal risk. Reports indicate that Gina meets the profile of women the president of Imagitech tends to be attracted to. This may create a window for advanced surveillance.

Summary to date: It has been four months since this scenario was implemented. Reports to date indicate that it has played out well. Gina was able to work Sarah into place. No notable hitches were reported. The opportunity for advanced surveillance the squad hoped for has not yet materialized, but has not been discounted. We have no reason to believe that the mission's security has been compromised at this time.

The first murder took place two months into the mission. Since that time, a new murder has occurred at a frequency of not less than one per week, with five reported in the third week. The precise whereabouts of every squad member cannot be ascertained during the times of the killings.

Argus Eyes Only

The Company has sent the squad out because something about these murders has raised the suspicions of the retired Ops that interpret mission data. While the Committee does its best to weed out potential problems before they are even approached by the Company, extreme situations can have extreme results. In this case, the Company's instincts are correct. One of the members of the squad is performing these killings. It is the Secop, John. The problem is his motive.

Imagitech Engineering has indeed made contact with the Greys. In fact, the Greys have been in on the company since its inception. This connection has been extremely hard to track because not even the CEO and founder of the firm is truly aware of it. The Greys have worked almost entirely through his dreams. While specific communication between our races is difficult, the transmission of images is much simpler. Ever since he first conceived the company, Herman Gander has been fed images of his manufacturing process. His highly analytical mind was able to seize these images, break them down, and turn them into practical applications.

As the surveillance progressed, John began to realize what was happening. With his remarkable sensory abilities, he was able to find a pheromone trace left by the Grey responsible. When he attempted to track the offender that night, he was taken . . . but only for a few minutes. The Greys had prepared for the possibility of Company interference, and had a strategic experiment prepared to implement on a moment's notice. John was captured, injected with a more sophisticated and selective version of the Cocktail, and turned loose, but with one minor addition. He now has a chip similar to the Imagitech CPU in his head. It monitors him as do the standard Grey chips, but it also absolutely destroys his ability to keep a secret. Not only can he no longer lie, he feels compelled now and then to blurt out awkward truths and damning statements. Each individual murder has been a cover-up. The only link between them is John.

The Secop knows what the problem is, and has connected the missing several minutes of his life with the embarrassing slips. However, two things keep him from coming forward. First, his survival instincts have been reset at "Extraordinarily Paranoid." He is convinced the squad will kill him on the spot and call it a clean up.

Second, John is completely dedicated to the Company. This dedication keeps him on the job because he knows he has abilities that others don't. He is convinced he can control, and eventually beat this problem on his own. He believes it is a matter of concentration and focus, rather than surgery and recovery. So far, his slips have been minor, and his skill in conversation and half-truths has allowed him to indulge his compulsion without revealing enough to be a real threat. On those occasions when he has slipped something truly important, he has taken his own steps. He refuses to resort to the Cocktail. That would cause the Company to ask dangerous questions that he can't cover for. He has actually had to kill several more people then the Company knows about, but has been able to do it by means of convenient accidents. The more people he kills, the more he strains his creativity. He knows that any sort of pattern will set off Company alarms. So far, he believes he has avoided detection.

The Ointment Coated Fly

Every cover-up has a hole in it. John has been trained specifically to find and eliminate such holes, and has put all of his skills to good use in the past weeks. Nonetheless, there are still some details that will tip the players off if they pay attention.

While Bill is responsible for maintaining surveillance on those members of his squad actively engaged in intelligence gathering, John is the one responsible for keeping track of the movements of the squad as a whole. The reason the precise locations of each squad member cannot be accounted for is because John is fudging his data. At no point is he actually lying (remember, he can't do that). Rather, he is exaggerating uncertainties, and planning his clean-ups accordingly. If two members usually go offline at similar, predictable times, John extends those intervals so that they overlap, and makes whatever move he needs to at that time.

If his moves are scrutinized, there is enough data in his reports to place him in the vicinity of each killing. However, he has used his exaggerations to good effect here, too. If there is the slightest room for uncertainty, John made sure to give himself the greatest benefit of each doubt. The problem here for the investigating squad is the sheer amount of data gathered. John has been tracking everyone's moves for four months! The files are in Blacknet.

John will avoid answering questions about these discrepancies if at all possible, going so far as to change the subject. As long as they are merely questions, he will take no overt action. Erasing the data would be too suspicious, and modifying it would be lying.

Another piece of evidence is John's increasing independence from the group. The Secop has deduced that the Grays are

responsible for his predicament. While he has no illusions about getting them to reverse the procedure, he does hope to catch one of them. He figures this will buy his life from the Company for his indiscretions and let him do his important work. John's absences are during low priority mission times, and are carefully placed nowhere near any of the killings. They are getting longer as John devotes more time to his growing obsession. He is working on a near-Academy level schedule, sleeping perhaps two to three hours a night, performing his regular duties, then engaging in his hunt during his down times. With the stresses of both the mission and his predicament weighing on him, this workload could very easily cause the psychotic break the Company feels may have already happened.

Catching the Fly

The Ops have several choices as to how to proceed. They can try to place the target squad under long term surveillance. This has advantages and disadvantages. The heroes have all the data they need to find their targets at almost any time. They know where and when to look, and who to look for. They also have a pretty good idea how their opposite numbers will react under given circumstances. (What Academy graduate hasn't taken Advanced Avoidance 706 with the dreaded Dr. Hildebrandt?)

The problem is that the on-site team will be looking for surveillance as part of their standard mission protocols. While they won't be at the top of their form, they won't be easy to tail either. If the pursuers are discovered, they could very easily find themselves on the wrong end of the hunt.

Alternately, the characters could simply insert themselves into the mission. They have the authority to do so from Whitehall. This would get them right up close to the team, but would heighten their alert status. Whitehall doesn't send reserves on a whim. Unless a very good cover story is provided, the on-site team will become suspicious that something is up . . . John in particular.

The characters could simply become active near the team, hoping to draw out whatever is happening. This is similar to the surveillance option. The main difference is the field of engagement. Active surveillance engages them as Ops. If the characters meet them socially, they will instead be dealing with the cover identities. This has the chance of getting John to make one of his embarrassing "confessions" to the characters. It wouldn't be long before the Secop was forced to make his move.

Revealing their identity as an Op would not save the characters. Rather, it would send John into a near berserk panic as he tried to escape. Should he get away, not only would he become a threat to the Conspiracy, he would probably remain active in his own way. Cut loose from Company policies and restrictions, John could become a deadly adversary as he stalks the globe hunting his redemption.

Into the Web

Whatever the team decides to do, at some point John will become aware of their nature and activities. After all, he's a Secop. It's his job to be aware of things like that, and he's very, very good at his job. If the character forces his hand early, he will do his best to make a quick getaway and pursue his revenge. Given his dedication to the Company, John will only do this if his cover is well and truly blown, and his problem is exposed. If there is any doubt in his mind at all, he will try to bluff it out a little while longer.

If John has enough time, though, a desperate plan will take shape in his mind. He knows his squad's orders. He knows what his people will and won't do, and has planned all his contingencies around these facts. Another squad, though, offers him a new way out. Shortly after John realizes what is going on, clues will begin to appear near the investigating squad. Snatches of Grey clothing, acid burns near their homes, lingering traces of cinnamon scent in the air. The squad's response to these clues will tell John a lot about what they are doing there. If they aggressively pursue these leads, then he will use the squad to help him on his hunt. In doing this, John is not lying. He *knows* there are Greys around. He just doesn't know where they are. He is reasonably sure they are dealing with Gander, but can't discover how. Therefore, he will aim the investigating squad at Gander.

If the squad does not follow up, then John will assume the worst. He knows the Company will catch up with him

eventually. He is desperate, not stupid. If the team doesn't follow up on the Grey evidence, he will assume they are after him, and his time is up. He will abandon his cover and move on Gander himself.

In either case, things will start moving very rapidly at this point. The on site team will not take kindly to interference in their mission objectives. If the characters move on Gander, the team will move on the characters, if for no other reason then to find out exactly what is going on. If John moves on Gander alone, the on site team will move on John. When this happens, the characters will also have to move also.

During that fracas, the Greys will strike.

Imagitech is considerably more important to the Greys than the Company imagined. The chip in the PlayPal is not hardwired to operate at slower speeds, as the Company first thought. It is working at capacity already. Using science not even vaguely understood by the boys in Tech, the PlayPal is slowly attuning the minds of countless teenagers and children to the telepathic wavelength of the Greys. It's a slow project, but then, the Greys still have well over a decade left before the next ship arrives. If they can successfully implement this plan, they will have thousands, perhaps even millions of humans susceptible to their powerful telepathic abilities. With an asset like that at their disposal, humanity will be theirs to do with as they pleased. Even the Company would be unable to stop them.

So far, only Gander has been able to translate the psionic projections of the aliens into practical applications. He is, therefore, a vital cog in the plan, and cannot be easily sacrificed. The present form of the chip is only the first stage of the process. He has been under close but cautious surveillance since the Greys first established contact. When the Company moves on him, the Greys will counterattack with everything they have available. When this happens, John will have fulfilled the ultimate purpose of the chip in his head. The Greys knew they couldn't break Ravenheart quickly enough to avoid alerting his squad. They also couldn't get enough out of him to ID the squad. The installed the chip to force the Company's hand. If John were caught, the Company would have to back out to avoid suspicion. If he weren't, eventually his paranoia would have forced him to take out his own team, and set him loose. If the Company took any other action, John would lead them directly to Gander. In doing so, he would play them right into the Greys hand.

You see, Gander's house is a gauntlet.

Gander's security system is much more advanced then he realizes. When John was captured, it was by a squad of Greys making modifications to that network. Until the Greys activate it, it acts exactly like Gander intended it to. It alerts the authorities and the household to attack or intrusion. Once activated fully, however, it becomes much more deadly, and tells no one but the Greys anything. The system will do its best to kill the characters, but will most likely only slow the Ops down. The Greys, who have a small ship nearby for just such an emergency, will handle mop up. The GM may tailor the Grey's numbers and equipment to the players. Gander's estate is large and private, so they will be able to fight freely so long as the Greys operate the system. The on site squad will have the layout down, but the intensity of the security will surprise them.

In the battle, John's chip will appear to burn out, as it was programmed to. If he survives, he will be free of its effects. The Greys know this, and will try very hard to make sure he does not survive. Whether the "burnout" is permanent or not is up to the GM.

The Greys will also try to preserve Gander. If they can get him out, the experience he remembers (totally different from what actually happened) will cause him to go underground and submit designs to his company by proxy and courier. He has already prepared for this eventuality, convinced by his own chip. What the Company chooses to do about that is another story.

Pyramid Review

The Horror Beneath (for D20)

Published by [Nightshift Games](#)

Written by Eric Metcalf

32 b & w pages; $8.95

> *(Editor's Alert: Like many adventure reviews, this one has spoilers. If you plan on playing this adventure, it's strongly recommended you* not *read it. You have been warned. We now return you to your regularly scheduled review.)*

The Horror Beneath is an adventure for four to five *D20* characters between the levels of 3rd and 5th. This is important for a few reasons. First, it's the first *D20* adventure for that range of characters. Second, it's the first adventure by a company other than [Wizards of the Coast](#) that challenges characters higher than first level.

The characters can become involved with the adventure in several ways. This includes the standard being hired to investigate, missing relatives, and being asked. The first and third methods are pretty similar save that the players get hired for the first scenario.

There are several NPCs in the adventure that lend the background some strength. One of the problems with the *D20* adventures is that every company uses their own setting, which makes connecting adventures troublesome. With strong characters to back it up, *The Horror Beneath* has the potential of being used for background in future games.

The main problem involves the small town of Scarborough, where people have been disappearing and iron has stopped flowing to the nearby lords. It's up to the players to discover why this is happening and stop it.

During the course of the adventure, the players can interact with the people of Ravendale. The town has some personality with two different inns, a number of dwarves offering their services, and three different temples. Most memorable, however, has to be The Order of Scarlet, a monk organization led by Logash, a gnome monk. Characters that do a little snooping around can discover some rumors and truths about the area. Unfortunately,there are no examples of using skills to gain said information, and no DC checks that have to be made.

On the way to Scarborough, the players encounter zombies. This encounter is a red herring though. The village of Scarborough has more areas for the players to investigate. The village square is made up of four buildings: a church, a blacksmith, a trading post, and the magistrate's home. All are empty, as is most of the town. A chance encounter with one of the few survivors leads the players to a home where they meet the Tendermores, the only survivors.

When night falls, the party is attacked by what appear to be zombies, but these undead cannot be turned. There are two problems with this encounter. The first is that there isn't a specific number of creatures. The second is that the encounter only ends when the creatures captures one of the party members, or failing that, two of the Tendermore women.

The players apparently cannot stop the zombies from retreating, as there is no option to ever regain the captured

people. The players have to follow the trail to Mine Twelve, an abandoned mine that is now the staging area for these zombie invasions which plague the land. Once there, the players have to overcome several traps and a new breed of monsters. The whole scene plays out very much like the movie *Aliens*. It turns out that these zombies that attacked the Tendermore house aren't undead at all (despite using Undead statistics such as d12 hit dice), but are parasites that turn their hosts into monstrous creatures. Further *Alien* references include a Brooder Queen, and Brooder Warriors aplenty for the characters to battle.

One of the problems with the conclusion is that there is no option for failure. There are no notes on what happens if the players all die, or if they retreat. What happens, for example, if the Brooder Queen is able to infect a 5th level warrior with her parasites? Does it become a 5th level Brooder Warrior, or become a 2nd level Brooder Warrior? Creatures like this might have made for a good template style monster.

Past the adventure, there is a section entitled the Whole Story, which gives the GM more information about the background of the adventure. Why not put this first? I've been in games where the GM simply picks up a adventure and runs with it. This isn't the correct way to do things, but nonetheless, it happens. After the Whole Story comes statistics for the Brooder Warrior, Grub Host, Brooder Queen,and Berullius, a necromancer whose practice in Mine Twelve reintroduced the Brooder menace to the world.

My main question about these creatures is: Why are their statistics repeated again? When they are first encountered, their stats are listed. With only 32 pages to tell a story, every advantage must be used to overcome the limits of the small package.

There are several maps to help the GM and players visualize the new area. The County of Leona, which is shown twice, is a bit dark, but readable. Ravendale and Scarborough both suffer from too much murkiness. Ironically enough, Mine 12, where the majority of the action takes place, uses standard grid mapping and is probably the easiest one to read.

The Horror Beneath suffers in a few areas. First, the adventure is only 27 pages long. The interior covers are not used. One page has to go to the *D20* license, while another two pages go to advertising *Black Powder Gods*, a new setting coming from Nightshift Games, and another page on credits (which should be covered with the credits on the first page), and an ad for *The Foundation*, another game from Nightshift games. Three and a half pages of advertising and one on the standard *D20* license does not make me a happy reader. Save the ads for the web site.

The adventure is useful if you're willing to convert the setting to your own and makes a good night or three of adventure for characters who have graduated beyond the 1st-3rd level adventures. If this book had been a little meatier, free of advertising, and used the interior covers, it would have been a much sounder buy.

-- Joe G. Kushner

by Hunter Johnson

Art colored by Keith Johnson

As far as I know, there haven't been any "Revisor's Notes" published in *Pyramid*. There have been plenty of Designer's Notes, but nothing for subsequent editions. So I'll have to be first.

The bulk of the book, the animal entries, didn't get revamped too much. They got shuffled around and split up a bit -- the mythological creatures and the speculative creatures each got their own section, like the dinosaurs and domesticated animals had before. A handful of new animals from the *Pyramid* readership were included as well.

The real change is in the back of the book, in chapter 5. Almost all of this chapter is new, and it was the most fun to work on. The Characters chapter is always the first thing I turn to in a new *GURPS* book. Even though I GM much more than I play, I like to take a look at any new setting through the characters' eyes first. In the earlier editions of **GURPS Bestiary**, however, there was no Characters chapter. Now there are rules for creating animal templates, sample templates for a wide variety of animals from Alligator to Yeti, and a sample character for almost every sample template. The chapter grew from my initial outline, at the expense of the folklore chapter (which is also mostly new).

Here are some additional templates that were not included in the final draft, for your enjoyment:

Diatryma   *(157 points)*

Attributes: Enhanced ST +20 (No Fine Manipulators) [105]; DX +4 [45]; IQ -7 [-60]; HT +6 [80]; Extra Hit Points +8 [40].

Advantages: Acute Hearing +5 [10]; Alertness +5 [30]; Claws (Talons) [40]; Damage Resistance 1 [3]; Enhanced Move x1 [10]; Passive Defense 1 [25]; Penetrating Call [5]; Peripheral Vision [15].
Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Edgy [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Increased Life Support [-10]; Incurious [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; Loner [-5]; Mute [-25]; Obdurate [-10]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Povery (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Short Lifespan x2 [-20]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].

Skill: Survival (Plains or Woodlands, specialized)-IQ+3/IQ+9 [10]

Notes: The horse was the only mount to get a template in the published book. Here's a more esoteric possibility for *Time Travel* or *New Sun* campaigns. As with the Deinonychus (p. BE108), some of this information is guesswork.

Eagle   *(-130 points)*

Attributes: ST -5 [-40]; DX +2 [20]; IQ -6 [-50]; HT +3 [30]; Reduced Hit Points -8 [-40].
Advantages: Acute Vision +4 [8]; Alertness +4 [20]; Enhanced Dodge x3 (Accessibility: Only while Flying) [32]; Enhanced Move (Flying) x2 [20]; Flight (Winged; Cannot Hover) [24]; Penetrating Call [5]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Sharp Claws [25]; Telescopic Vision 3 [18].
Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Edgy [-5]; Fragile [-20]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; Loner [-5]; Mute [-25]; Poor Grip [-5]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -5 [-25]; Restricted Manipulators [-15]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Lifespan x3 [-30]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].
Skill: Survival (Mountain or Woodlands, specialized)-IQ+2/IQ+8 [8]

Ferret   *(-174 points)*

Attributes: ST -9 [-80]; DX +5 [60]; IQ -5 [-40]; HT +2 [20]; Reduced Hit Points -8 [-40].
Advantages: Acute Taste/Smell +4 [8]; Alertness +5 [25]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Decreased Life Support [10]; Early Maturation x1 [5]; Enhanced Move x1/2 [5]; Faz Sense (3-hex range, -20%) [8]; Four Legs [5]; Night Vision [10]; Sharp Teeth [5].
Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Dull [-1]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-15]; Innumerate [-10]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Lifespan x6 [-60]; Sleepy (75%) [-25]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15]; Staid [-1].
Skill: Survival (Plains or Woodlands, specialized)-IQ+1/IQ+7 [6]

Notes: Pet-store ferrets will rarely have any Survival skill at all. This is true for many quasi-domesticated animal species.

Gibbon   *(-84 points)*

Attributes: ST -7 [-60]; DX +5 [60]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +3 [30]; Reduced Hit Points -10 [-50].
Advantages: Alertness +4 [20]; Ambidexterity [10]; Brachiator [5]; Enhanced Move (Brachiating) x1/2 [5]; Extra Arms x2 (Short Arms; temporary disadvantage: "legless" while in use; -35%) [6]; Fur [4]; Increased Speed x1 [25]; Penetrating Call [5]; Perfect Balance [15]; Super Climbing x3 [9]; Super Jump x4 [40].
Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Cannot Swim [0]; Dull [-1]; Edgy [-5]; Intolerance (other gibbons of the same sex) [-5]; Mute [-25]; Odious Racial Habit (noisy) [-5]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) -1 [-5]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Livespan x4 [-40]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].
Skill: Survival (Jungle or Mountain, specialized)-IQ/IQ+6 [4]
Quirks: Highly territorial [-1].

Notes: Siamangs share the same template with the following changes: ST -5 [-40]; Super Jump x3 [30]; Reduced Hit Points -8 [-40]. Template cost for siamangs is -49 points.

Orangutan   *(40 points)*

Attributes: ST +5 [60]; DX +3 [30]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +4 [45]; Extra Hit Points +1 [5].
Advantages: Alertness +4 [20]; Brachiator [5]; DR 1 [3]; Enhanced Move (Brachiating) x1 [10]; Extra Arms x2 (Short Arms; temporary disadvantage: "legless" while in use; -35%) [6]; Long Arms [20]; Super Climbing x3 [9].
Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Cannot Swim [0]; Careful [-1]; Dull [-1]; Laziness [-10]; Loner [-5]; Mute [-25]; Poor Grip [-5]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Reduced Move (Running) [-5]; Semi-Upright [-5]; Short Lifespan x3 [-30]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].
Skill: Survival (Jungle or Mountain, specialized)-IQ/IQ+6 [4]

Raccoon   *(-90 points)*

Attributes: ST -6 [-50]; DX +4 [45]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +4 [45]; Reduced Hit Points -7 [-35].
Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [4]; Acute Vision +1 [2]; Alertness +6 [30]; Cast Iron Stomach [15]; Claws [15]; Decreased Life Support [10]; Early Maturation x1 [5]; Faz Sense (Eye Contact Only; -20%) [8]; Metabolism Control x4 (Hibernation; -50%) [10]; Night Vision [10]; Reproductive Control [2]; Sharp Teeth [5]; Super Climbing x2 [6]; Thick Fur [29].
Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Curious [-5]; Horizontal [-10]; Inconvenient Size [-15]; Innumerate [-5]; Mute [-25]; Poor Grip [-5]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Reduced Move (Running) x1 [-5]; Short Arms [-10]; Short Lifespan x5 [-50]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15].
Skills: Swimming-DX [1], Survival (Swampland, Urban, or Woodlands, specialized)-IQ/IQ+6 [4].

Notes: Brian Smithson created this one after the *Bestiary* playtest, and agreed to let me include it here. Along with the ferret, very useful for running Grey Ghost Games' new adventure *Another Fine Mess* with *GURPS*.

Velociraptor   *(13 points)*

Attributes: ST -2 [-15]; DX +5 [60]; IQ -6 [-50]; HT +2 [20]; and Reduced Hit Points -6 [-30].
Advantages: Acute Hearing +2 [4]; Acute Taste and Smell +2 [4]; Alertness +6 [30]; Claws (Long Talons) [55]; Combat Reflexes [15]; Early Maturation [5]; Enhanced Dodge [15]; Enhanced Move x2 [20]; Peripheral Vision [15]; Scales [3]; Sharp Teeth [5].
Disadvantages: Attentive [-1]; Bestial [-10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Edgy [-5]; Hidebound [-5]; Incurious [-5]; Innumerate [-5]; Mute [-25]; No Depth Perception [-10]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Poor Grip [-5]; Presentient [-20]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15]; Sleepy (50%) [-10].
Skills: Survival (Plains or Woodlands, specialized)-IQ+2/IQ+8 [8].

Notes: I created the Velociraptor template and was trying to wedge Johnny Dino (p. BE101) into its small package when I decided to switch to the Deinonychus instead. But this will certainly fit into 100-point campaigns better!

Wild Boar   *(47 points)*

Attributes: Enhanced ST +10 (No Fine Manipulators) [66]; DX +4 [45]; IQ -4 [-30]; HT +5 [60]; Extra Hit Points 5 [25].
Advantages: Acute Taste and Smell +4 [8]; Alertness +4 [20]; Damage Resistance +1 [3]; Early Maturation x1 [5]; Enhanced Move x1/10 [1]; Faz Sense (3-hex range, -20%) [8]; Four Legs [5]; Fur [4]; Passive Defense 1 [25]; Sharp Teeth [5].
Disadvantages: Bestial [-10]; Color Blindness [-10]; Dull [-1]; Horizontal [-10]; Innumerate [-10]; Mute [-25]; No Fine Manipulators [-30]; Poverty (Dead Broke) [-25]; Presentient [-20]; Short Lifespan x4 [-40]; Sleepy (50%) [-10]; Social Stigma (Barbarian) [-15]; Staid [-1].
Skill: Survival (Woodlands, specialized)-IQ/IQ+6 [4].

Research

Determining the levels of Extended or Short Lifespan, Early or Late Maturation, and Less Sleep or Sleepy can be tricky, since the normal Bestiary entries do not include any data. General encyclopedias are often useful for this, and here are some websites which have some of this information for multiple animal species:

http://library.thinkquest.org/25553/english/animals/when/index.shtml
http://www.sleephomepages.org/sleepsyllabus/fr-b.html
http://www.geocities.com/longevityrpt/lr57.htm
http://www.ris.net/~yarberry/Brett1697/animals.htm

Dork Tower!

Missed the special **Dork Tower**/**PvP** Crossover Event Week?
Check it all out here:

The full **Dork Tower** run so far: [Tue](#) - [Wed](#) - [Thu](#) - [Fri](#)

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by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

Let's Get Organized! . . . Or Maybe Not

One of my biggest quirks as a GM is my continued insistence on almost no preparatory notes before running an adventure.

For example, let's look at some notes from my second *Aberrant* adventure:

> West Lake & N Dearborn St / East Randolph & State Street
>
> November 23rd, 2007: George Ottman (Mayor of Chicago) offers the PCs
>
> DosPrompt
>
> - Hard sell from Corbin

Those are my entire pre-typed notes.

Either shortly before, or during the adventure, I hand-scribbled:

> Puerto Rico/Guam
>
> Ann Kolinsky
>
> Circus 901 W. Weed St. (near North and Clyburn aves.)
>
> Captain Earl Hawkins -- Information Officer, Fort Sheridan
>
> Underworld bar -- Matchsticks

Those are the entire notes. Just over 50 words for an adventure that ran for six hours.

Of course, I had lots of *internal* preparation, and I'm sure that, at the time, those notes made perfect sense to me. But currently they don't (though parts, of course, mean something).

Now, my style of taking notes differs from several of my GM friends' styles. Dennis, for example, has a beautiful knack for creating nearly *every* aspect of a game world, with 3-ring binders filled with notes. A typical transcript might thus look like this:

Dennis: "Okay; you are in Southampton. The Vampire Prince of the city has asked you to investigate a mystery in London. You also have a lead about some odd rituals being performed in York."

Us: "Let's go to Las Vegas!"

Dennis (flipping pages): "Okay; the Vampire Prince of Las Vegas is named Carl Desota. He is currently locked in political machinations with his second-in-command about who should control the local tabloid."

Us: "Bah! Let's go to Antarctica!"

Dennis (flipping pages): "The South Pole has one very cold vampire, ostensibly the Prince, named Flores Gilder. She's in charge of security for half the year at the research station Amundsen-Scott. You're in luck! It's the six months

of the she's awake!"

And so on.

He also uses a checklist system of adventures, where he has certain events that might happen, and when they do, he checks them off. Thus he might have an adventure outline that looks like:

- PCs are invited to a party at the museum
- After party, PCs confronted by mysterious stranger (contact of Mercenary's Guild) at the lake
- The head of the Mercenary's Guild offers PCs a job to investigate the disappearance of an associate in the mines
- PCs offered 10,000 credits to *not* take the job by someone else on the subway ride there . . .

etc.

This isn't terribly different from my method, except his lists tend to be more detailed, and he *does* check off events when they happen. Thus if the PCs don't go on the subway, the subway event doesn't happen. All told, it's fairly easy weeks or months later to reconstruct what happened by going down the list.

There are other methods, too. Some GMs like to concoct elaborate histories and character backgrounds, so that they understand what all their NPCs are feeling, and can thus construct the plots and machinations of all the major players on the fly.

Some GMs like to construct timelines of events that *will* happen, regardless of player interaction. ("10:12 pm -- The Duchess meets with Cap'n Munch.") Others like to create their adventures around the players' involvement. ("The PCs witness the Duchess interacting with Cap'n Munch.") Others wing it even further, hoping that a situation will present itself where the relevant information can be presented to the PCs. ("The PCs learn of the Duchess's scheme with Cap'n Munch.") And I'm sure there's even more methods.

All of these methods have their advantages and disadvantages. Some methods (like the set timeline) feel much more rich and realistic, with events that happen around the players whether they get involved or not. These methods can, if not used carefully, make the PCs feel like they don't know where to start; where are they supposed to *be* at 10:12 pm, and if they aren't there, will the Evil Scheme reach fruition without them?

Other methods feel much more cinematic, with the PCs always being at *just* the right place and time. But that can make the PCs feel like they don't have free will; can they spend two weeks wasting time at the casino, and just *happen* to stumble across the jewel thief on their way out? If so, does it matter *what* the PCs do?

Anyway, the point of this column is this: I definitely don't believe GMing is a science, but feel instead that it's an art that is very personal. Finding out what's right for you is the crucial thing. My style evolved because, no matter how much I tried to prepare, my players always wandered off in random directions. Why bother making up every possible NPC in the city when the players might decide to start calling people in the next city over? Plus, no matter what kind of solutions I devised to a problem, they'd always come up with something different.

Nowadays I've started campaigns with the vaguest of notes and a list of unassigned names: for example, Suzan Singer, Franklin Spelling, Roberta Del Toro, and Dan Postlethwaite were among the starting names of one of my campaigns. The PCs want to visit a television reporter for information? That's Suzan Singer. They want to go to City Hall? No problem; Franklin Spelling is there to answer any questions. And so on. I'd jot notes after the names about who these people "really" were now, and moved on.

Is this technique good for everyone? Of course not! But it works for me, and it might work for some other folks. Other methods might work much better for them. While I hope this seems obvious, I've meet too many folks in print, on the net, and in person who seem to view their way of GMing as the One True Way, which is nonsense.

Experiment. Try new things. Find out what works for you. If you're having fun, and the players are having fun, then that's all that really matters.

And don't ever let anyone convince you otherwise.

* * *

By the by, I'd like to make a public announcement about our new blazing-fast web discussion boards. The result of tireless hours of revamping, the new program is literally leaps and bounds above what has gone before, able to handle huge lists like never before. If you haven't checked our discussions out in the past, now is a great time to do so. A lot of cool people are over there, including yours truly in the General Discussion About Pyramid section.

(Oh, and of course our Discussion Groups are still usable with your favorite NNTP newsreader. Who loves ya, baby?)

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **Death Star Technical Companion** (West End Games), p. 84

(Three stars) "In fact, it adds to the not-quite-rightness of the campaign if, for example, one day the waiter serves only whiskey (non-alcoholic) and the next day 'only beer is available here, sir,' or if one day phones have dials and the next day all calls must be placed through an operator."

Melts In Your Mind, Not On Your Hands

"I want the world
I want the whole world
I want to lock it all up in my pocket
It's my bar of chocolate
Give it to me now."
-- Veruca Salt (Julie Dawn Cole), *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*

We still don't know why we want it -- pharmaceutical chemistry makes a few good guesses, but can't reliably explain anything. We aren't sure where we got it -- archaeologists push its origins further back every year. We don't know who makes it -- half the American market is controlled by the most paranoid and secretive establishment outside the CIA. But every American soldier carries it with them; it's distributed to children on the night when the dead walk the earth, and without it, love (we have somehow come to understand) is meaningless. It's chocolate, and there has to be something more there, behind that silver foil wrapper.

Americans eat eleven pounds of it a year -- more, in a good year. Globally, cocoa production is around 2.9 million tons; the American chocolate retail market alone is worth $14 billion a year. Facts are available, if you look for them -- but meaning, well, that has to be left to the imagination; which is to say, gaming. I've based much of what follows, then, on the reliably sound facts in Sophie and Michael Coe's *The True History of Chocolate*. But this column is something far sweeter -- the Secret History of Chocolate. How many licks does it take to get to the center of the Conspiracy? The world may never know.

"This saying was said of cacao . . . nowhere did it appear in times past. The common folk, the needy did not drink it. Hence it was said, 'The heart, the blood, are to be feared.' And also it was said of it that it was like Datura; it was considered to be like the mushroom, for it . . . intoxicated one . . . it was not drunk unthinkingly."
-- Fr. Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain*

Chocolate comes (after any number of different processes not restricted to roasting, fanning, dutching, alkalizing, pressing, and conching) from the cacao bean. The word "cocoa" comes from an English misspelling of the Spanish version, *cacao*, of the Mayan *kakaw*, which itself seems to derive from the Olmec *kakawa*. (The word "chocolate" either comes from Aztec *xocoatl*, "bitter water," or a Spanish mixture of the Maya *chocol*, "hot," with the Aztec *atl*, "water," in all cases referring to the original cacao-and-peppers beverage of the natives.) Carolus Linnaeus, apparently irked at the confusion, gave the original name second place when he named the cacao tree *Theobroma cacao*. Theobroma; "food of the gods." (Let us remember, however, what H.G. Wells decided was the Food of the Gods, and in our speculations wonder precisely how They will use human fat to make up for the projected global chocolate shortage in 2020.) The Aztecs, Mayas, and other Mesoamerican nations had a peculiar relationship with cacao -- to them, also, it was the "food of the gods," given to them by our old ancient astronaut buddy Quetzalcoatl. As Father Sahagún reports, they used it (under the peculiar kenning "the heart, the blood") in hallucinogenic beverages, and sacred communion with astral entities. The Aztecs seem to have transformed it from a sacred beverage to a luxury; Montezuma reportedly wept when a sorcerer warned him the Aztecs were doomed for debasing cacao.

Chemically, modern pharmacists can't explain it. Cacao does contain caffeine, the mild dopamine-trigger phenylethylamine (which is apparently molecularly very similar to Ecstasy), and the alkaloid theobromine. (Theobromine is also found in yerba buena and kola nuts, both also used in shamanic trance practices.) Most commercial chocolate has far less theobromine than the pure stuff that apparently kept Balboa's men wired for three straight days of crossing Panama, but even at its top levels chemistry can't find any reason for cacao to trigger hallucinations. Of course, there are well over 300 trace chemicals in cacao, and at least five major varieties of the plant -- perhaps the heirs of the Mayan priesthood still know the recipe for True Chocolate, and they're waiting for the end of the world in 2012 to share it.

"Ellegua likes the following foods: chicken (if you're vegetarian, get a box of frozen chicken nuggets and defrost one whenever you need an offering), rum (small nip bottles are great for this) and CHOCOLATE. Three M&M's are great.

Find a small offering dish to give him things in -- we have a little black cup."
-- Raven Kaldera, "Orisha Altar-Building"

Or maybe they're protecting us from it. Cacao, although credited to Quetzalcoatl, seems to have been a major offering to the far less pleasant god Huitzilopochtli. Now we start thinking about that icky Aztec poetic metaphor "the heart, the blood," and the whole Food of the Gods thing and wondering exactly what we've gotten our sticky fingers into. (And just what secret Huitzilopochtli worshipper first started packing Valentine's chocolates into a heart-shaped box, anyway?) Chocolate is also a favored offering to voodoo loa such as Legba (the master of the crossroads and the mirror; the Key and the Gate), Oya (a Santería orisha associated with wind and spirits), and Le Baron Cemetaire -- the graveyard loa of the dead. And we're back on Halloween, tossing Hershey bars to ghosts. Is there some deeper reason that a richly chocolate cake is called Devil's Food?

"[T]he murder of the Pope has been proven by the clearest evidence. A slow poison was given him by his own innocent [confectioner] in a dish of chocolate last Holy Thursday at the Vatican, where he assisted at the ceremonies of the day. It is surprising that he who from the beginning of his pontificate had taken every precaution to avoid what he always feared, should persist in drinking the chocolate . . ."
-- Sir Horace Mann, letter to Horace Walpole, Oct. 8, 1774

And just why did the Jesuits (in popular legend at least) adopt it as their favored method of murdering people? Pope Clement XIV, who suppressed the Jesuits in 1773, died of a remarkably unpleasant wasting disease in September of 1774. Frederick the Great was saved from poisoned chocolate by the fortunate accident of a spider falling into the cup; when he called for a refill, the chocolatier, fearing that he had been found out, shot himself. (That, they say, is why there's a spider painted on the ceiling of Frederick's anteroom in his palace at Sans Souci. There may be another reason.) The Jesuits did, in fact, control virtually all the trade in South American chocolate, and their international network of houses and missions may have been responsible for spreading cacao, and chocolate-drinking, worldwide. (The Jesuits, not to change the subject or anything, have also long been particularly intent on meditations to visualize the Sacred Heart; no connection with "the heart, the blood," and hallucinogenic theobroma, I'm sure.)

Chocolate-drinking was, in fact, also connected with conspiracy by the royal houses of France and England, where it was monopolized or banned outright. Cardinal Alphonse de Richelieu introduced it to his more famous brother, who passed it on to Mazarin, who obtained the royal monopoly on chocolate for his creature Sieur David Chaliou. (The later Medici were also big chocolate fans, as was the Marquis de Sade.) Charles II attempted to close "any Public . . . House" selling "Coffee, Chocolate, Sherbet, or Tea" in 1675 as dens of license and political subversion. Interestingly enough, after the Stuarts were dethroned, such establishments as the Cocoa-Tree in St. James' Street or White's Chocolate House became dens of Jacobitism and Freemasonry. White's, intriguingly, had a back room called "Hell." Just thought you should know.

" "What made Forrest [Mars]'s blood rush was the thrill of mastering new opportunities and taming uncharted worlds. Like Milton Hershey, he was driven by his visions; but where Milton Hershey saw utopia, Forrest Mars saw conquest."
-- Joël Glenn Brenner, *The Emperors of Chocolate*

As the industrial era came of age, methods of processing, refining, and smoothing the bitter taste of natural cacao turned chocolate from a political stimulant into a global confection -- suitable for global conspiracies. (The Secret Chocolate Wars no doubt parallel the wars of wines in Tim Powers' *Earthquake Weather*.) James Baker and John Hannon began the first chocolate-mill in America in 1765; "Hannon's Chocolate" became "Baker's Chocolate" in 1799 after Hannon was mysteriously lost at sea in the (voodoo loa-controlled) Caribbean. The Gnomes of Zurich began their involvement in the global chocolate conspiracy in 1819, when Francois-Louis Cailler opened his factory on Lake Geneva; Philippe Suchard began the Suchard-Toblerone empire in 1826; Henri Nestlé birthed the largest food company in the world in 1879 after inventing milk chocolate. In 1854, John Cadbury received a Royal Warrant as chocolatier to Queen Victoria, and the Round Table Group entered the scene. (Why, precisely, did Italian chocolatier Domingo Ghirardelli travel to San Francisco via theobromine-rich Peru -- was it to get an Imperial Warrant from the Emperor Norton?) Milton Hershey tried to build a Utopian chocolate-town in Pennsylvania (just as Henry Cadbury did in Bournville); his bitter rival Forrest Mars (inventor of M&Ms, born in future UFO nexus Tacoma, Washington) became a billionaire recluse, living over a massive chocolate factory in Las Vegas. (Masking himself from

Huitzilopochtli's vision? Or prolonging his unlife by inhaling the sacred fumes?) The Mars Company, however, remained headquartered in McLean, Virginia, and worked closely with their neighbors, the CIA. The true story of the Chocoluminati may never be told -- except in your game. But keep one thing in mind -- revenge is sweet.

Pyramid Pick

The Knuckleduster Firearms Shop

Published by Knuckleduster Publications

Written by Forrest Harris

122 pages; $19.95

One of the great difficulties I personally have with many Western RPGs is that I have a hard time, as a player, coming up with different and unique characters. The solitary gunman wandering the prairie, looking for vengeance? Seen it. Especially in realistic campaigns, where you don't have magic or other abilities to differentiate yourself, how do you keep everyone from melding together?

One way is to choose trademark gear. Jesse James' Schofield, J.E.B. Stuart's LeMat, The Lone Ranger with his silver bullets. The problem is, most of us don't have the knowledge necessary to know what that *means*. Many games provide stats for a dizzying array of guns, but what do they look like? What makes them different and special?

Knuckleduster Publications has come to the rescue with the ***Knuckleduster Firearms Shop***, chock full of real-world Western information that will do wonders for many campaigns in making it all feel real.

The book opens with an explanation of its rating system. Since this is a generic book, it uses a seven-word rating system (Superb, Great, Good, Fair, Mediocre, Poor, Terrible) that should look immediately familiar to users of ***Fudge***. It also includes worthwhile notes for converting to most systems by aligning those seven words with similar items that should be common for most systems; for example, "Terrible" damage is the equivalent of a fist punch; Severe is the same as a Colt Army .45 Peacemaker or a Winchester 1873. In this way you should be able to align your system with this books'. The last page of the book also includes a ***Deadlands*** conversion key.

Next is a ten page chapter called "Cops on Gunfighting." This chapter consists of interviews with three officers who give their insights into what gunfights are *really* like. Although it felt a little out of place, it can be argued that policemen are the closest equivalents of the sheriffs of yore, so their inclusion *does* make a fair amount of sense. For the purposes of realistic gaming, so, too, does their advice. For example: "The vast majority of our homicide by firearm deaths are simply a 'I've had enough of your s---' and BLAM! Once or twice at point-blank range." (That quote alone gave me an idea for how my PCs might be introduced to a campaign's tone . . .)

The book is then broken down into five chapters on the guns of various eras: 1849-1859, 1860-1865, 1866-1872, 1873-1885, and 1886-1900. This is the meat of the book. Each chapter opens with a brief overview of the era, its history, and what demands were placed on its weaponry. After this intro come the guns.

Generally one gun is presented per page. Each gun has its history presented, the year it was invented, and the Caliber and Action. In the seven word game terms, it presents Damage, Drawing Speed, Rate of Fire, Concealment, and Reliability. The cost of the weapon at the time it was available is given, as are ranges for Close, Medium, Long, and Maximum Effective. For the realistically minded, the reload procedure for each is presented. Finally, any specific quirks of the weapon, like flash burn, accidental discharge, and jammed lock, are described.

Guns detailed are from the common (like most of the Colt weapons) to the rare (like the LeFaucheaux's 20-Shot Pinfire Revolver) to the bizarre (like the Frankenau's Purse Revolver: a gun hidden in a purse . . . a weapon perfectly suited for the1877 female spy who has everything). Each gun is presented with a photo, catalog clipping, or illustration. Some guns have multiple illustrations.

Given how boring I generally find talk of guns, the writing in **Knuckleduster Firearms Shop** is surprisingly crisp and entertaining, full of straight information as well as trivia and flavor. For example, the history of the Colt Model 1862 says:

> "Colt had always made a short-barreled weapon for the purpose for those who wanted greater concealment without sacrificing performance. The names often implied a noble purpose: Shopkeeper's pistol, Trapper's pistol, Police revolver. Of course, foot-pads, gamblers, and other ne'er-do-wells found these compact weapons the ideal tool to get their jobs done."

Or the Colt Third Model Deringer: "There's not much to dislike about this slick little pistol. Except for the fact that you can't hit anything with it, it's a truly excellent choice." And I'm not even going to *mention* what the Remington Double-Derringer, often hidden in garters and bras, was called in some quarters.

The quirks and reloading procedures are great, making Critical Failures and in-combat reloads that much more flavorful and exciting. And the number of just plain *odd* guns means you can have characters wielding all manner of odd weapons. It's going to be a sore temptation, for example, to create a Western character who uses the LeFaucheux Knife Revolver.

The book closes with a useful (if short) chapter of accessories, like holsters (including fast-draw holsters and swivel holsters), sights, and other gear. It also has an index.

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In all, **Knuckleduster Firearms Shop** does exactly what it sets out to do: describe the wide range of innovation, variety, and ideas (good and bad) in the Old West for gamers in a generic fashion. And, in so doing, it made me excited to add some of the variety to any Western I would run. Forget bad guys with generic .45's . . . watch out for the leader with the Jarre Harmonica Gun, with its weird horizontal sliding clip of ammo.

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-- Steven Marsh

Pyramid Review

Siege on Tolkeen Three: Sorcerers' Revenge (for Rifts)

Published by **Palladium Books**

Written by Kevin Siembieda

112 pages; $12.95

The battle continues in the third chapter of Kevin Siemieda's *Rifts* war saga, with *Siege on Tolkeen Three: Sorcerers' Revenge*. The heat is turned up even further in this book, and gamers are provided with even more material for adventuring in the ongoing war campaign.

The stage was set by the first *Siege on Tolkeen* book, and the story further explored in the second. Here, Siembieda turns the attention back around to the nation of Tolkeen and focuses primarily on them and their response to the Coalition's rally to their initial defense (as explored in *Book Two*). *Sorcerers' Revenge* is primarily devoted to readily usable game material rather than plot or setting development, making it a pretty useful book for most.

The first two thirds of the book are devoted to Tolkeen's heroes, and it is in turn broken down into three sections. The first is the introduction of some new races. As you would guess, they are all races of D-Bees who are loyal fighters for the nation of Tolkeen. Palladium seems to avoid falling into its trap of simply presenting new power-gamer fodder with these races, as each is pretty interesting and well-rounded. The real bad news is that there are only three of them: the Auto-G, the D'Norr Devilmen, and the Larmac.

The Auto-G's, a race of very adept shape-shifters (perfect spies and assassins), are a bit heavy-handed and might have been under-balanced, had Siembieda not made the Coalition the world's leading expert on detecting them. This sets the stage for some serious cat-and-mouse espionage games, with Tolkeen trying to infiltrate the Coalition, and their adversary watching their every move with a trained eye. The other races provide plenty of room for plot development too, with the beastly but gentle D'norr and the ever-lazy Larmacs.

Just as *Siege on Tolkeen Two* gave us a bunch of NPC mercs and military operatives (mostly for the CS), so too does this book. But this time, most of the material is for Tolkeen. The NPCs presented are all very well-rounded, much better in fact than the ones presented in the last book, and this time there are more of them. The different characters draw primarily upon races and classes established in some of the related books (*Rifts: Canada*, *Rifts: Coalition War Campaign*, etc.) and are put to good effect. We get just and noble fighters, such as Sir Bokobo the Noli Cyber-Knight, selfish fighters, like the Lord Murgesh lead Simvan Raiders, and truly evil ones, such as Lord Ultim and the Dark Cabal. All have their own reasons for fighting in the war, and they just go to demonstrate the diversity of the fighting force on the Tolkeen side.

I will stop here a moment to nitpick about one aspect of this section. One of the NPC groups, Kado & Co., lead by respected Tolkeen patriot Jara Kado, are on a mission to find a communications bunker in the area that might be linked to a "killer satellite" still orbiting Earth -- one that might be used by Tolkeen to change the tide of the war. Her band of followers is one of the most diverse and interesting present, and much time is spent (nine pages) developing this little plot strand involving the company's race against the Coalition to find this satellite control. And then Siembieda comes straight out and says, no we're not allowed to put this in our campaigns. This is a bit of a break in form from Siembieda's usual style of simply setting the stage and providing whatever necessary caution, and it's just kind of annoying. Why waste nine pages and a bunch of good NPCs on a red herring? Sure, you can make the (plenty legitimate) argument that red herrings happen in war all the time, but it's just a tad frustrating to have something so juicy with a "No, No" sign on it. I guess you could always ignore the warning, but like I said I wanted to nitpick for a

second.

This section also includes material on the Vanguard. They are a super mysterious organization of wizards who are secretly and anonymously allied with the Coalition. This group was hinted at in previous material, and it is quite interesting indeed. The Coalition is a nation bent on the eradication of all magic and all non-humans, who would persecute the Vanguard just as it would any other illegal organization. Yet, they continue to fight for the Coalition, casting a helping hand from the shadows whenever they can. This group is mysterious beyond mysterious (Siembieda doesn't even give us stats for the leaders) and is something that most GMs will probably use in their campaigns eagerly. In fact, it's something that's easily worth checking out even if you aren't planning on running a *Siege on Tolkeen* campaign.

And then we bring out the guns -- er, more guns anyway. In the first book, Siembieda revealed Tolkeen's new line of super weapons, the Iron Juggernauts. Well, he follows it up here with a more dynamic line up that rounds out the bunch. These machines are made for flying through the air and swimming through the sea, giving GMs more toys to play with. And, yes, they are quite beefy.

The only section truly devoted to both sides is that on adventure generation tables. Here were are provided with tables for rolling up quick adventures (as the name would imply). It opens up, telling us that we will be provided with tables for all kinds of adventures, from rescue a friend, to search and destroy, to protect the town. However, tables are only provided for missing person adventures and random encounters. These are quite extensive and rounded out evenly for all kinds of parties, but it would have been nice to get a better diversity. However, the tables are quite good for coming up with adventures on the fly, or at least for generating good adventure ideas (for those who don't like the risk of rolling those dice).

A very small amount of the book is spent furthering the war's plot line. In response to the Coalition's increased efforts, Tolkeen has planned a massive rally, in which they will make an all-out blitz against the Coalition's main lines. Full details are provided for Tolkeen's plan of attack, but unfortunately the fate of the battle is already decided. I won't tell you what it is, but I will say that it's kind of frustrating to have things made up for you. Then again, one must remember that this is a six book series, and that some advancements in the story are going to have to be made and be predetermined. Fortunately, enough is left to the imagination so that GMs will be able to flesh out the details as they see fit.

The big fat cherry at the end of the book, and that which you've all been waiting for, is the specs on the mysterious shadow dragons. These beasts were hinted at in (and even pictured on the cover of) earlier books, and no doubt a lot of gamers are eager to see them. I won't go and spoil it, but I will say that they're not what one would expect. They are pretty good however. Siembieda hasn't just provided us with just another power-gaming beast, but has instead created a plot thread that is quite dynamic and bears a lot of consequences on the fate of the war.

The cover art on this book is another excellent piece by Dave Dorman (who did the first book as well), and the interior art is for the most part pretty good. It should be noted that there are more reprints here than in other books, but they aren't that overwhelming. The layout is, of course, as per the Palladium Books standard.

This book provides a pretty solid follow-up to the previous two. It builds upon the material established in the first two books, and it adds plenty of new material ready to be used. Its lack of setting material, while a hindrance, also makes it of use to gamers not planning to run a *Siege on Tolkeen* campaign. These first three books have set the stage and gotten the war off to a firm start. Now, hopefully, Palladium will follow it up with some good twists and turns in the final three.

-- Jon Thompson

by Onno Meyer and Hans-Christian Vortisch

Art by ArtToday and Dan Smith and Colored by Keith Johnson

Arizona Smith was hacking his way through the jungle towards the hidden temple. No way Doktor Müller would get there first in his truck. Suddenly he heard a strange noise. A bulldozer? Here? Then he saw the tank breaking through the saplings . . .

Heavy Metal: Four 20th Century Tanks for GURPS

* * *

Sgt. Young sneaked through the night. In a few hours thousands of paratroopers would jump out of their planes all over Normandy, and before that happened his resistance team had a mission to do. But something looked wrong as he approached the bridge. Could that be tanks? . . .

* * *

The way in would be simple, Agent 700 thought. Just glide down the telephone line. But that was no way out. Steal a truck and crash through the gate? No very good plan, with machineguns in the guard towers. Of course they could try to get one of the tanks. "Tanya, have you ever driven a T-55?" . . .

* * *

Ramirez peered through his binoculars. The Greys had selected a good position for their camp. Did the aliens expect an attack? Whatever the reason, they'd need something heavier than their Hammer railguns. Perhaps the Spook on the squad could "borrow" a MBT from the locals. Their SecOp would have screaming fits, of course, but something had to be done before they dug in even more . . .

* * *

Heavy armor can be useful in many "action" adventures, not just in vehicle centric wargame campaigns. Here is a selection of historical vehicles that covers most of the 20th century, from early TL6 to late TL7. For each of the four tanks, there is a historical introduction to help the GM place it in a campaign, a detailed description, and finally a reasonably realistic representation using ***GURPS Vehicles***.

Foster Heavy Tank Mk I (Male), UK, 1916   (TL6)

History: The Foster Heavy Tank Mk I (Male) was the first fully tracked, armored, and armed combat vehicle. It was developed by a team at Foster & Co in England during the first years of WWI in response to trench warfare, initially under sponsorship of the Royal Naval Air Service. The "Landships Committee" had experimented with several patterns until concentrating on the now familiar box with all-around tracks. The first "tanks" (a cover name to foil the Germans) were delivered to the British Army's "Heavy Section, Machine Gun Corps" (another cover) in June 1916. They were first deployed to France in August 1916. Tanks were used in combat for the very first time on September 15th, 1916 at Flers-Courcelette in the Battle on the Somme. During the early days they were used in very small numbers, usually three at a time. At least once they even a single tank, a tactic which failed to deliver the impact they might have had otherwise. Really successful use would only be made of later versions.

Only 75 of the "Male" version described here were built, plus 75 "Female" tanks armed with 7.7x 56mmR Vickers Mk I machine guns instead of the main guns. Most of these tanks were gradually rebuilt as unarmed supply or radio tanks as the improved successors of the Mk I entered service.

Description: The Foster Tank Mk I (Male) looked like a box with lozenge-shaped all-round tracks and two box-like sponsons on either side. It was typically painted with a 4-color brown/green/black camouflage pattern, but also with olive drab overall. The vehicle was made from face-hardened armor plates which were riveted together like a boiler, partly sloped on the front. The crew entered through doors in the rear of the side sponsons. There was no compartmentalization, everything including the engine and fuel tank being included in the fighting compartment. The driver sat on the right side of the front. He could not steer the vehicle by himself, needing the assistance of both the brakeman to his left and the two gearsmen in the rear of the tank. The brakeman was also the commander.

Between the driver and the commander was a forward-firing 7.7x56mmR (.303 SAA) Hotchkiss No 2 Mk I machine gun (p. HT118), which was usually operated by the commander, but could also be fired by the driver, if necessary. The machine gun fed from 14-round strips. Behind them, in the middle of the vehicle, was the hand-started, unsilenced Daimler gasoline engine and the munition for the onboard guns. Each sponson mounted a manually-operated 57x305mmR (6-pounder) Hotchkiss QF Mk I naval gun with L40 barrel, which could be traversed through 90 degrees, which allowed firing to the front or side. It was manned by a single gunner, who loaded and fired it by himself. The standard ammunition was of the LE type. Some canister rounds were carried against troops. Also in each sponson was a ballmount for a side-firing Hotchkiss No 2 Mk I machine gun. When not firing the machine guns, the machine gunners assisted with loading the main guns. Revolvers, usually the 11.5x20mmR (.455 SAA) Webley No 1 Mk VI (p. HT110), and No 5 Mk I *Mills Bomb* hand grenades (p. HT117) were stowed in a compartment near the commander's position.

The fuel tank was located in the rear of the vehicle under the roof. Its gravity-feed was a distinct disadvantage, since the engine would starve when the vehicle was reared at certain angles. Also in the rear of the hull was the transmission and the stations of the two gearsmen. Each was responsible for the secondary gears of one track, and had to change it when signaled by the driver. The engine, the transmission, and the guns all resulted in quick heat and fume built-up in the confines of the machine. The only crew comfort carried by the vehicle was a water tank near the commander's position. For communications, the vehicle carried signal flags and two pigeons in a basket.

One of the major shortcomings of both the Mk I and all its successors was the armor, which was riveted to steel girders and braces. This meant that even non-armor-piercing rifle projectiles could enter at the seams and either penetrate or cause spall. The armor-piercing bullets fired by the German 7.92x 57mm DWM-Maxim MG08 machine gun (pp. HT117-118) and 20x70mmRB Becker TAK16 autocannon could often penetrate the plating from most angles anyway. It was common for the crew members to wear face armor (DR 2) to protect the face and eyes from spall. Under concentrated machine gun fire, the crew would often fling themselves to the floor, so little was the protective value. The vehicles were also very vulnerable to their own guns and most field guns of the era.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Tracks (Tr, two tracks). Two superstructures (Su1 on BoR and Su2 on BoL). 30 degree slope on BoF.
Propulsion: 77 kW tracked drivetrain (Bo, HP 30).
Armament: Two 57mm QF Mk I Guns (Su1R, Su2L, HP 40 each). 302 x TL5 57mm LE rounds (Bo, HP 50). 30 x

TL5 57mm canister rounds (Bo, HP 11). Casemate mounts for QF Guns (Su1, Su2, HP 27 each). Three 7.7mm No 2 Mk I Machine Guns (BoF, Su1R, Su2L, HP 4 each). 6,272 x 7.7mm rounds (Bo, HP 11). Casemate mounts for Machine Guns (Bo, Su1, Su2, HP 2 each).

Instruments: Signal hoists. Two pigeon cages (Bo, HP 10 each). Two telescopes (Su1R, Su2L, x 1.5, vision bonus +1, HP 1 each).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls, "Commander" operates brakes and forward-mounted Machine Gun, two "Gearsmen" operate secondary gears, two "Gunners" operate QF Guns and telescopes, two "Machine Gunners" operate side-mounted Machine Guns and load QF Guns, all from roomy crew stations (Bo, HP 75 each). *Crew:* "Driver," "Commander," two "Gearsmen," two "Gunners," two "Machine Gunners". *Occupancy:* Short. *Provisions:* 24 gallon light tank (Bo, fire +2, HP 15). 24 gallons water.

Power and Fuel: 77 kW standard gasoline engine (Bo, uses 3.465 gph G, HP 30) powers drivetrain. 46 gallon tank (Bo, fire +1, HP 22). 46 gallons gasoline (fire on 12) last for 13 hours 17 minutes.

Access and Empty Space: 21.48 cf access space (Bo), 192.87936 cf empty space (Bo), 2.775 cf each empty space (Su1, Su2).

Volume: Bo 660 cf, Tr 396 cf, Su1, Su2 30 cf each.

Area: Bo 500 sf, Tr 400 sf, Su1, Su2 60 sf each, total area 1,020 sf.

Structure: Extra-heavy, very cheap frame.

Hit Points: Bo 3,000, Tr 1,200 each, Su1, Su2 360 each.

Body Armor: BoF PD 5, DR 50 expensive metal armor, BoR, BoL, BoB PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor, BoT, BoU PD 4, DR 20 expensive metal armor.

Track Armor: Tr PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor.

Superstructure Armor: Su1F, Su2F PD 4, DR 35 expensive metal armor, Su1R, Su1B, Su2L, Su2B PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor, Su1T, Su1U, Su2T, Su2U PD 4, DR 20 expensive metal armor.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Doors in both superstructures, no headlights, no keys.

Statistics: Cheaply made. Empty weight 51,334.5 lbs. Fuel 276 lbs. Ammo 3,007.232 lbs. Crew and water 1,804 lbs. Loaded weight 56,421.732 lbs. (28.21 tons). Volume 1,116 cf, size modifier +5. Price $59,168.5. HT 10.

Ground Performance: Speed 17 mph. gAccel 1 mph/s. gDecel 20 mph/s. gMR 0.25. gSR 6. Very low GP, off-road speed 4/5.

Note: The calculated top speed is far too high. 3.7 mph forwards and 1 mph backwards are more realistic.

MAN PzKpfw V Panther Ausf G (SdKfz 171), Germany, 1944-1945   (TL6)

History: Many authorities believe that the German *Panzer-Kampfwagen V Panther* was the best tank of WWII. It had neither the thickest armor nor the most powerful gun, but it was rated the best overall vehicle, with a good gun, effective armor (whose front facing was impenetrable for most Allied tank guns from all but the closest distances) and good mobility. Built in response to the advanced design of the Soviet T-34, it was a marked improvement over earlier German tanks. The Allies expected to lose five M4 *Sherman* or nine T-34 tanks for each *Panther* destroyed. Three main versions were made by a number of companies under leadership of MAN beginning in 1943, the Ausf A, D, and G. The Ausf G entered production in February 1944 and was made until the end of the war.

Five *Panthers* were sold to Hungary, and quite a few captured specimens were used by American, British, French, and Soviet units. Very small numbers (two or three at a time) were even used in several instances by the French and Polish resistance. After WWII, *Panthers* served in the Czechoslovakian, French, Hungarian, Romanian, and Yugoslavian armies for some time, but these were scrapped in the early 1950s.

The basic chassis was used for several other vehicles, including the *Befehlspanther* command tank, *Bergepanther* armored recovery vehicle and *Jagdpanther* tank destroyer. Before the Battle of the Ardennes, elements of the *Panzer-Brigade 150* camouflaged a number of their tanks with sheet metal and paint to look like American M10 tank destroyers.

Some 3,740 G-models were built for the German Army (for a total of about 6,000 of all variants), almost three times as many as for example the *Tiger I* Ausf E. It was deployed in platoons of five.

Description: The *Panther* was a very modern-looking tank, with sloped armor facings and a long gun. It was typically painted with various camouflage patterns, including a 3-color sand/brown/green pattern and white overall. The driver sat in the front of the hull on the left side. The hull machine gunner to his right fired the 7.92x57mm Rheinmetall PzMG34 tank machine gun (p. HT119), which fed from 150-round belts carried in special belt pouches. He also operated the radio located between the driver and himself. Both had hatches in the hull roof, as well as escape hatches in the hull belly behind their seats.

To their rear was the main fighting compartment with the turret. The gunner sat on the left side of the turret, the commander behind him and slightly elevated. The loader had his station on the right side. The commander had a hatch above him. There was also a small escape hatch in the turret rear. The 75x639mmR Rheinmetall KwK42 rifled gun had a L70 barrel. Two types of ammo were available, APCBCHE and HE. An improved APCR round had been issued in 1943, but by the time the Ausf G reached the troops, it had already been removed from service for lack of tungsten. The ammunition was stowed throughout the hull, mostly in the sides above the tracks, but also behind the driver and hull gunner. The turret had an open basket so that the ammo could be easily reached.

To the right of the main gun was the PzMG34 coaxial machine gun, also fed by a 150-round belt. Another PzMG34 was installed on a rotating skate mount at the commander's hatch for anti-aircraft fire. Any one of the machine guns could be removed from the vehicle and, when fitted with the bipod and buttstock carried onboard, used in the infantry role if necessary.

In the rear turret roof was a 92mm *Nahverteidigungswaffe* reloadable discharger, which fired smoke bombs. It could be rotated through 360 degrees, but was fixed in elevation, to give a smoke screen at about 75 yards from the tank. It was loaded from the inside. With its breech open it could also be used as a gun port for the 26.5x150mmR Walther KP42 flare pistol, which fired star shells, orange marker smoke and a special HE grenade (Exp.* 1d-1[2d]). The HE grenade was for close defense of the dead angles and detonated at a distance of about 10 yards (20 of these were carried).

All crew members were armed with pistols, usually the 9x19mm Walther P38 with two magazines each. A single 9x19mm ERMA MP40 submachine gun (p. HT116) with six magazines was stowed in the turret, and six *Stielhandgranaten* (p. HT117) were also carried. The Maybach gasoline engine, the fuel tanks and batteries were in the rear, separated from the crew by a fireproof bulkhead.

    Subassemblies and Body Features: Tracks (Tr, two tracks). Two open mounts (Om1 and Om2, full rotation, on TuT). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT). 60 degree slope on BoF. 30 degree slopes on BoB, TuF, TuB, TuR, TuL.
    Propulsion: 515 kW tracked drivetrain (Bo, HP 100).
    Armaments: 75mm KwK42 Tank Gun (TuF, HP 100). 41 x 75mm APCBCHE rounds (Bo, HP 27). 41 x 75mm HE rounds (Bo, HP 27). Two 7.92mm PzMG34 Machine Guns (BoF and TuF, concealed, HP 7 each). 7.92mm PzMG34 Machine Gun (Om1F, HP 4). 4,650 x 7.92mm solid rounds (Bo, HP 9). 150 x 7.92mm solid rounds (Tu, HP 1). Casemate mount for PzMG34 (BoF, HP 5). Universal mount for PzMG34 (Om1, HP 2). 92mm *Nahverteidigungswaffe* (Om2, concealed, HP 8). 12 x 92mm Smoke rounds (Tu, HP 5).
    Instruments and Electronics: Medium communicator (Bo, 10 miles, HP 2, 0.1 kW). Telescope (TuF, x5, vision bonus +2/+4, HP 2). Telescope (BoF, x1.5, vision bonus +1, HP 1).
    Miscellaneous Equipment: Fire extinguisher system (Bo, HP 13).
    Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls, "Hull Machine Gunner" operates body-mounted Machine Gun, communicator and telescope, both from normal crew stations (Bo, HP 60 each), "Commander" operates open-mounted Machine Gun, "Gunner" operates Tank Gun, turret-mounted Machine Gun and telescope, "Loader" operates *Nahverteidigungswaffe* and loads Tank Gun, all from normal crew stations (Tu, HP 60 each). *Crew:* "Driver," "Hull Machine Gunner," "Commander," "Gunner," "Loader". *Occupancy:* Short. *Environmental Systems:* Environmental control for five persons (Bo, HP 6, 1.25 kW).
    Power and Fuel: 515 kW standard gasoline engine (Bo, uses 23.175 gph G, HP 100) powers drivetrain. Two 5,184 kWs lead-acid batteries (Bo, HP 5 each) power other systems for 128 minutes, recharged by engine. Two 55 gallon tanks (Bo, fire +1, HP 25 each), 35 gallon tank (Bo, fire +1, HP 19), 30 gallon tank (Bo, fire +1, HP 17), 18 gallon

tank (Bo, fire +1, HP 12). 193 gallons of gasoline (fire on 12) last for 8 hours 20 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 126.6 cf access space (Bo), 20 cf cargo space (Bo), 63.4755 cf empty space (Bo), 0.105 cf empty space (Om1), 9.8835 cf empty space (Tu).

Volume: Bo 700 cf, Tr 420 cf, Om1 1 cf, Om2 1.8 cf, Tu 240 cf.

Area: Bo 500 sf, Tr 400 sf, Om1 6 sf, Om2 9 sf, Tu 250 sf, structural area 1,150 sf, total area 1,165 sf.

Structure: Heavy, very cheap frame.

Hit Points: Bo 1,500, Tr 600 each, Om1 12, Om2 18, Tu 750.

Special Structural Option: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo.

Body Armor: BoF PD 6, DR 385 expensive metal armor, BoB PD 5, DR 160 standard metal armor, BoR, BoL PD 4, DR 140 expensive metal armor, BoT PD 4, DR 45 standard metal armor, BoU PD 4, DR 60 standard metal armor.

Track Armor: Tr PD 4, DR 30 standard metal armor with PD 3, DR 10 cheap metal track skirts.

Turret Armor: TuF PD 5, DR 325 standard metal armor, TuB, TuR, TuL PD 5, DR 140 standard metal armor, TuT PD 4, DR 45 standard metal armor.

Surface Feature: Camouflage paint job.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Two hatches on body top, two hatches on body underside, hatch on turret top, hatch on turret rear, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 93,806.95 lbs. Fuel 1,158 lbs. Ammo 2,542.7 lbs. Crew and cargo 1,400 lbs. Loaded weight 98,907.65 lbs. (49.45 tons). Volume 1,362.5 cf, size modifier +5. Price $248,276.1. HT 8.

Ground Performance: Speed 30 mph. gAccel 2 mph/s. gDecel 20 mph/s. gMR 0.25. gSR 6. Low GP, off-road speed 2/3.

Uralvagonzavod T-55A obrazets 1970g, USSR,   (TL6- 1970-1979   7)

History: The T-55A (1970) was the main production version of the ubiquitous T-55 family. The basic T-55 entered production in 1958, and was based on the earlier and quite similar T-54-series. It was followed by the improved T-55A in 1961. In 1970, production switched to the T-55A (1970), and many vehicles of earlier manufacture were upgraded to this standard. License-produced vehicles were also made in Czechoslovakia and Poland, while China and Romania build similar vehicles.

The T-55 was a good design when introduced, heavily armored and with an effective gun. It was also cheap and made in large numbers. Today, it is usually considered as the "Warlord's Special," that is as a budget vehicle with questionable performance, often used by irregular troops in backwater countries. Second-hand vehicles have been sold for $10,000 apiece! It stands no chance against modern designs, but is extremely widespread, with the number of users exceeding 40 countries, most of them in East Europe, Africa, and Asia. Variant models and derivatives are too numerous to mention, but despite continuous upgrading programs, there are still many T-55s in this or a similar configuration around. One of the simpler and more common upgrades was the T-55A (1974), which had a laser rangefinder added over the gun mantlet.

Production in the USSR ceased in 1979, after about 20,000 T-55s of all variants had been made (plus some 9,000 in Czechoslovakia and Poland).

T-55s were widely used in combat, including during fightings in Afghanistan, Egypt, Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Uganda and Yugoslavia. In the Soviet Army, it was deployed in platoons of three.

Description: The T-55A (1970) was of conventional layout, with the engine at the rear. It was typically painted olive drab. The driver was seated on the left side of the hull front, with a hatch above him. To his right was some of the main gun ammunition stowage. To his rear was the fighting compartment with the turret. The gunner sat on the left side, with the commander behind him. The loader was on the right side.

The main armament was the 100x707mmR Degtyarev D-10T2S rifled gun with L56 barrel. Originally, it fired HE,

APCBCHE, APDS and HEAT rounds. In the 1990s, the 3,000 or so T-55s remaining in Russian service had HE, APFSDS and HEAT available. All ammunition was stowed below the hull roofline. To the right of the main gun was the 7.62x54mmR Kalashnikov PKT machine gun (p. HT120). The weapon fed from a 250-round belt. Early models of the T-55 did not mount an anti-aircraft machine gun. However, the T-55A (1970) did again receive such a weapon. The 12.7x108mm Degtyarev DShKM heavy machine gun (p. HT120 under "NSV") at the loader's hatch fed from a 50-round belt.

Driver, gunner and commander had IR-lights and IR-sights for night combat. Driver, gunner, and commander were armed with 9x18mm Makarov PM pistols (p. SO98) with two magazines each, while the loader had a 7.62x39mm Kalashnikov AKMS assault rifle (a folding stock variant of the AK-47, pp. HT114-115) with four magazines. A 26.5x103mmR SPSh-2 flare pistol and ten F-1 hand grenades were provided for distribution among the crew.

The engine was a turbocharged diesel which could also burn other fuels. By injecting diesel into the exhaust, the tank could generate a smoke screen to hide behind. The Soviets pioneered the external fuel tank concept. Only 180 gallons of fuel were carried inside the vehicle; 75 gallons were carried in three unarmored fuel tanks on the right fender above the track. As an option, another 110 gallons could be carried in two fuel drums on the hull rear. The T-55 could ford rivers and other water bodies up to 5 yards deep by installing a snorkel over the loader's periscope. The snorkel was usually carried on the turret rear and took about 15 minutes to install.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Tracks (Tr, two tracks). Open mount (Om, full rotation, on TuT). Nine pods (Po1-Po7 on BoT, Po8, Po9 on BoB). Turret (Tu, full rotation, on BoT). 30 degree slope on BoF.
Propulsion: 425 kW tracked drivetrain (Bo, HP 75).
Armaments: TL6 100mm D-10T2S Tank Gun (TuF, HP 125). 15 x 100mm APDS rounds (Bo, HP 21). 22 x TL6 100mm HE rounds (Bo, HP 27). 6 x 100mm HEAT rounds (Bo, HP 11). Full stabilization for D-10T2S (Tu, HP 27). 7.62mm PKT Machine Gun (TuF, concealed, HP 6). 1,250 x 7.62mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 4). 750 x 7.62mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 2). TL6 12.7mm DShKM Heavy Machine Gun (OmF, HP 8). 300 x TL6 12.7mm AP rounds (Bo, HP 4). 200 x TL6 12.7mm AP rounds (Tu, HP 3). Universal mount for DShKM (Om, HP 5).
Instruments and Electronics: Medium communicator (Tu, 30 miles, HP 1). IR searchlight (TuF, 0.5 miles, HP 2, 0.5 kW). IR searchlight (TuF, 0.25 miles, HP 1, 0.25 kW). IR searchlight (BoF, 0.05 miles, HP 1, 0.05 kW). Telescope (TuF, x7, vision bonus +3/+5, HP 2). Telescope (TuF, x5.5, vision bonus +2/+4, HP 1). Telescope (TuF, x3, vision bonus +2/+3, HP 1). Navigation instruments (Bo, HP 4).
Miscellaneous Equipment: Full fire suppression system (Bo, HP 16). Smokescreen (Bo, HP 8).
Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls and 0.05 mile IR searchlight from cramped crew station (Bo, HP 50), "Commander" operates radio, 0.25 mile IR searchlight, x5.5 telescope (daysight) and x3 telescope (nightsight), "Gunner" operates Tank Gun, Machine Gun, 0.5 mile IR searchlight and x7 telescope, "Loader" operates Heavy Machine Gun and loads Tank Gun, all from cramped crew stations (Tu, HP 50 each). *Crew:* "Driver," "Commander," "Gunner," "Loader". *Occupancy:* Short. *Environmental Systems:* NBC kit for four persons (Bo, HP 10, 1 kW).
Power and Fuel: TL6 425 kW HP diesel engine (Bo, uses 19.125 gph D, HP 100) powers drivetrain. Snorkel (Tu, 2.5 yards, HP 4). Four 3,024 kWs lead-acid batteries (Bo, HP 3 each) power other systems for 112 minutes, recharged by engine. 84 gallon tank (Bo, HP 40), two 40 gallon tanks (Bo, HP 20 each), 16 gallon tank (Bo, HP 11), three 25 gallon tanks (Po5-Po7, HP 15 each), two 55 gallon tanks (Po8, Po9, HP 25 each). 180 gallons of diesel (Bo, fire on 9) last for 9 hours 25 minutes, 75 gallons of diesel (Po5-Po7, fire on 9) last for 3 hours 55 minutes, 110 gallons of diesel (Po8, Po9, fire on 9) last for 5 hours 45 minutes.
Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 87 cf access space (Bo), 5 cf cargo space (Bo), 3.5 cf each cargo space (Po1, Po2), 3 cf cargo space (Po3), 1.5 cf cargo space (Po4), 13.5529 cf empty space (Bo), 0.55 cf empty space (Om), 2.8735 cf empty space (Tu).
Volume: Bo 330 cf, Tr 198 cf, Om 3 cf, Po1, Po2 3.5 cf each, Po3 3 cf, Po4 1.5 cf, Po5-Po7 3.75 cf each, Po8, Po9 8.25 cf each, Tu 160 cf.
Area: Bo 300 sf, Tr 250 sf, Om 13 sf, Po1, Po2 14 sf each, Po3 13 sf, Po4 8 sf, Po5-Po7 15 sf each, Po8, Po9 25 sf each, Tu 200 sf, structural area 894 sf, total area 907 sf.
Structure: Bo, Tr and Tu extra-heavy, cheap frame, Po1-Po9 light, standard frame.
Hit Points: Bo 1,800, Tr 750 each, Om 26, Po1, Po2 11 each, Po3 10, Po4 6, Po5-Po7 11 each, Po8, Po9 19 each, Tu 1,200.

Special Structural Option: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo.

Body Armor: BoF PD 5, DR 490 expensive metal armor, BoB PD 4, DR 125 expensive metal armor, BoR, BoL PD 4, DR 220 expensive metal armor, BoT PD 4, DR 90 expensive metal armor, BoU PD 4, DR 55 expensive metal armor.

Track Armor: Tr PD 4, DR 30 expensive metal armor.

Pod Armor: Po1-Po9 PD 2, DR 3 expensive metal armor.

Turret Armor: TuF PD 4, DR 560 expensive metal armor, TuB PD 4, DR 175 expensive metal armor, TuR, TuL PD 4, DR 415 expensive metal armor, TuT PD 4, DR 105 expensive metal armor.

Surface Features: Sealed. Camouflage paint job.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Hatch on body top, hatch in floor, two hatches on turret top, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 75,493.32 lbs. Fuel 2,190 lbs. Ammo 2,314.5 lbs. Crew and cargo 1,130 lbs. Loaded weight 81,127.82 lbs. (40.56 tons). Volume 730.25 cf, size modifier +4. Price $585,853.8. HT 9.

Ground Performance: Speed 40 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 20 mph/s. gMR 0.25. gSR 6. Low GP, off-road speed 2/3.

Note: The engine of the T-55A (1970) is multifuel-capable, something impossible at TL6 under *Vehicles* rules.

Krauss-Maffei *Kampfpanzer Leopard 2A5,* Germany, 1995-2000   **(TL7)**

History: The German *Leopard 2* was the first of the current Western main battle tanks, superseding the *Leopard 1-* series in front-line service with the German *Bundeswehr* beginning in 1979. It introduced the 120mm smoothbore gun now customary on Western tanks and featured the British-designed Chobham armor. The *Leopard 2* was built in a number of minor production variants, older vehicles gradually being upgraded to the final production standard, the *Leopard 2A4* of 1987. In 1995, the *Leopard 2A5* was introduced by upgrading older vehicles. It had markedly improved protection over the frontal turret area, as well as many other modifications. Slightly customized versions of the *Leopard 2A1* were adopted by the Netherlands and Switzerland. During the 1990s, surplus vehicles of A1-A3 standard from the German and Dutch armies were sold to Austria, Denmark, Spain and Sweden. In addition, Sweden purchased the Strv122, a further improved variant also known as the *Leopard 2A5S*. So far, almost 3,000 vehicles have been built in Germany, Sweden and Switzerland, but only 350 of those in the 2A5 configuration detailed here. The Netherlands use a very similar model known as the *Leopard 2A5NL* (from 1995). Beginning in 2001, all German A5s will be upgraded to the *Leopard 2A6* configuration, which will be armed with a longer gun. Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain and Switzerland will upgrade their vehicles to at least this standard as well.

The basic chassis was also used for the *Büffel* armored recovery vehicle.

The *Leopard 2* has not yet seen combat, but both Dutch and German 2A5s were deployed to the former Yugoslavia in 1999. A German platoon consisted of four vehicles.

Description: The *Leopard 2A5* was painted in the NATO-standard 3-color green/brown/black camouflage pattern. It was of conventional outlay. The driver sat in the hull front on the right side. To his left was a stowage rack for 27 rounds of main gun ammunition, accessible to the loader through the open turret basket. In the floor behind his seat was an escape hatch. Behind the driver was the turret with the rest of the crew. The gunner sat on the right side, with the commander behind him, slightly elevated. The commander had a hatch above him in the roof. The loader had his station on the left side, also with a hatch above him. The main armament was a 120x560mmR Rheinmetall BK120-1 smoothbore gun with L44 barrel. It fired HEDP and APFSDS rounds with semi-combustible casing.

The APFSDS has continuously been improved, the latest type penetrating much more armor than the earlier rounds. The ballistic computer could be programmed to handle a third type of round. Foreign rounds such as American APFSDSDU, Israeli Canister or Swedish HE could then be fired, but were not used by the German Army. 15 ready

rounds were stowed in an anti-blast magazine in the turret bustle. The computer supported shots to a range of 4,400 yards. The commander could override his gunner and fire the main gun himself. To the left of the cannon was the 7.62x51mm Rheinmetall MG3A1 machine gun, the latest incarnation of the WWII-vintage MG42 (see p. HT119 under "MG34"). It fed from a 500-round belt, and another 500-round belt was positioned nearby for quick change-over. A second MG3A1 was installed in a rotating open mount at the loader's hatch. This fed from a 100-round belt in a small can. When fitted with a bipod, it could also be used dismounted.

In German service, the driver and gunner were issued a 9x19mm H&K P8 pistol (a variant of the USP, p. HT109) with two magazines each, while the commander and loader had a 9x19mm IMI MP2A1 submachine gun (*Uzi*, p. HT116) with seven magazines each. A 26.5x103mmR H&K P2A1 flare pistol (**High-Tech** 1st ed., p. 124) and four DM51 hand grenades were also carried. The powerful MTU turbocharged engine in the rear was designed to also be able to run on other fuel grades, including gasoline and jet fuel (at slightly lower performance). The engine, drivetrain and batteries were separated from the fighting compartment by bulkheads, as were the explosion-proof fuel tanks located in the sponsons above the tracks.

Subassemblies and Body Features: Tracks (Tr, two tracks). Open mount (Om1, full rotation, on Tu1T). Four open mounts (Om2-Om5, two each on Tu1R, Tu1L). Turret (Tu1, full rotation, on BoT). Turret (Tu2, full rotation, on Tu1T). 30 degree slope on BoF. 60 degree slope on Tu1F.

Propulsion: 1,100 kW tracked drivetrain (Bo, HP 125).

Armaments: 120mm BK120-1 Tank Gun (Tu1F, HP 125). 10 x 120mm Late APFSDS rounds (Tu1, HP 18). 5 x 120mm HEDP rounds (Tu1, HP 11). 18 x 120mm Late APFSDS rounds (Bo, HP 27). 9 x 120mm HEDP rounds (Bo, HP 17). Full stabilization for BK120-1 (Tu1, HP 25). Anti-blast magazine for 15 x 120mm rounds (Tu1). 7.62mm MG3A1 Machine Gun (Tu1F, concealed, HP 6). 2,000 x 7.62mm solid rounds (Tu1, HP 5). 2,750 x 7.62mm solid rounds (Bo, HP 6). Full stabilization for MG3A1 (Tu1, HP 1). 7.62mm MG3A1 Machine Gun (Om1F, HP 3). Universal mount for MG3A1 (Om1, HP 2). 16 76mm *Nebelwurfkörper* Decoy Dischargers (four each Om2-Om5, HP 3 each). 16 x 76mm CHEM (Hot Smoke) rounds (four each Om2-Om5, HP 1 each).

Instruments and Electronics: Two medium communicators with scramblers (Tu1, 30 miles, HP 1 each). Telescope (Tu1F, x8, vision bonus +3/+5, HP 2). Telescope (Tu1F, x12, vision bonus +3/+6, HP 2). Telescope (Tu2F, x24, vision bonus +4/+8, HP 4). Light amplification (BoF, HP 1). Two thermographs (Tu1F, Tu2F, 3.2 miles, scan rating 14, HP 3 each). Digital vehicle camera (BoB, HP 1). Navigation instruments (Tu1, HP 4). Inertial navigation system (Tu1, HP 6). Military GPS (Tu1, HP 1). Two laser rangefinders (Tu1F, Tu2F, 6 miles, HP 2 each). Dedicated, hardened minicomputer (Tu1, C2, HP 7) with targeting (C2, +3 to hit).

Miscellaneous Equipment: Full fire suppression system (Bo, HP 16). Bilge pump (Bo, HP 30, 1 kW).

Controls: Mechanical. *Crew Stations:* "Driver" operates maneuver controls, light amplifier and digital vehicle camera from normal crew station (Bo, HP 60), "Commander" operates Decoy Dischargers, radios, x24 telescope, thermograph, laser rangefinder, navigation instruments, inertial navigation system and GPS, "Gunner" operates Tank Gun, turret-mounted Machine Gun, x12 telescope, backup x8 telescope, thermograph, laser rangefinder and computer, "Loader" operates open-mounted Machine Gun and loads Tank Gun, all from roomy crew stations (Tu, HP 75 each). *Crew:* "Driver," "Commander," "Gunner," "Loader". *Occupancy:* Short. *Environmental Systems:* NBC kit for four persons (Bo, HP 10, 1 kW).

Power and Fuel: 1,100 kW turbocharged standard diesel engine (Bo, uses 38.5 gph D, HP 175) powers drivetrain. Eight 5,400 kWs lead-acid batteries (HP 4 each) power other systems for 360 minutes, recharged by engine. 92 gallon self-sealing tank (Bo, fire -1, HP 40). 74 gallon self-sealing tank (Bo, fire -1, HP 30). 66 gallon self-sealing tank (Bo, fire -1, HP 30). 61 gallon self-sealing tank (Bo, fire -1, HP 27). 13 gallon self-sealing tank (Bo, fire -1, HP 10). 306 gallons of diesel (fire on 8) last for 7 hours 57 minutes.

Access, Cargo and Empty Space: 222.2 cf access space (Bo), 12 cf cargo space (Bo), 13 cf open cargo space (Tu1B), 23.0475 cf empty space (Bo), 0.035 cf empty space (Om1), 8.475 cf empty space (Tu1).

Volume: Bo 715 cf, Tr 429 cf, Om1 0.726 cf, Om2-Om5 1.252 cf each, Tu1 300 cf, Tu2 1.08 cf.

Area: Bo 500 sf, Tr 400 sf, Om1 5 sf, Om2-Om5 7 each, Tu1 300 sf, Tu2 6 sf, structural area 1,206 sf, total area 1,239 sf.

Structure: Extra-heavy, very cheap frame.

Hit Points: Bo 3,000, Tr 1,200 each, Om1 10, Om2-Om5 14 each, Tu1 1,800, Tu2 36.

Special Structural Options: Heavy compartmentalization in Bo and Tu1. Improved suspension.

Body Armor: BoF PD 5, DR 1,100 advanced laminate armor, BoB PD 4, DR 140 standard metal armor, BoR, BoL

PD 4, DR 305 advanced laminate armor, BoT PD 4, DR 90 standard metal armor, BoU PD 4, DR 55 standard metal armor.

Track Armor: Tr PD 4, DR 40 standard metal armor with PD 4, DR 135 expensive composite skirts.

Turret Armor: Tu1F PD 6, DR 2,400 advanced laminate armor backed with DR 15 non-rigid armor, Tu1B PD 4, DR 110 advanced laminate armor backed with DR 15 non-rigid armor, Tu1R, Tu1L PD 4, DR 740 advanced laminate armor backed with DR 15 non-rigid armor, Tu1T PD 4, DR 90 standard metal armor backed with DR 15 non-rigid armor, Tu2 PD 3, DR 10 standard metal armor.

Surface Features: Sealed. Camouflage paint job. Hitch.

Vision: Poor.

Details: Hatch on body top, hatch in floor, two hatches on turret top, intercoms, headlights and running lights, no keys.

Statistics: Empty weight 121,442.25 lbs. Fuel 1,836 lbs. Ammo 2,317.2 lbs. Crew and cargo 1,300 lbs. Loaded weight 126,895.45 lbs. (63.45 tons). Volume 1,450.814 cf, size modifier +5. Price $5,021,044. HT 10.

Ground Performance: Speed 45 mph. gAccel 3 mph/s. gDecel 20 mph/s. gMR 0.5. gSR 7. Low GP, off-road speed 2/3.

Notes: The commander can override the tank gun control, which can't be properly represented in *Vehicles* rules. The engine of the *Leopard 2A5* is multifuel-capable, again something impossible at TL7 under *Vehicles* rules. The armor details are still classified, but even an educated guess creates problems. The thickness of side armor increases considerably towards the front, which we had to average. The speed came out too high, but was corrected using the "Making Lemons" sidebar.

Tank Weaponry

It would be surprising if eleven real-world weapons exactly matched the formulae from *Vehicles*, but fortunately the rules allow for some adjustments. This wasn't always enough -- we had to introduce a new ammo type (APCBCHE) and adapt the rules for plastic-cased ammunition to cover semi-combustible cases, the newer machine guns are a little too light, the decoy dischargers get too much range, and the modern HEDP rounds get too little punch.

New KE-Class Ammunition:

APCBCHE, Armor Piercing Capped, Ballistic Capped, High Explosive (TL6): An anti-armor round with a small amount of explosive. Available only for cannon.

Type	Damage	Rng	WPS	CPS	Acc
Cr.	KE(2)	-	-	x3	-

plus Exp.* CxX/100,000

Weapons

Name Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
Hotchkiss QF Mk I Gun, 57×305mmR (TL6)														
TL5 LE	Crit.	Exp.*	4d+1[4d]	25	14	1,300	5,600	1/3	880	$5,400	8	0.08	$4.8	0
TL5 Canister	Crit.	Cr.	2d		9	220	930				8	0.08	$2.4	
Hotchkiss No 2 Mk I Machine Gun, 7.7×56mmR (TL6)														
Solid	Crit.	Cr.	6d+2	20	13	840	3,900	9*	26	$390	0.056	0.00037	$0.028	0

Name Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
Rheinmetall KwK42 Tank Gun, 75×639mmR (TL6)														
APCR	Crit.	Cr.	6dx15(2)	30	16	2,200	7,800	1/4	2,400	$13,000	31.5	0.21	$80	1
HE	Crit.	Exp.*	6dx3[6d]		16	2,200	7,800				22	0.21	$33	

Name Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
APCBCHE plus	Crit.	Cr.	6dx11(2)		16	2,200	7,800				31.5	0.21	$47	
plus		Exp.*	3d[6d]											

Rheinmetall PzMG34 Machine Gun, 7.92×57mm Mauser (TL6)

Solid	Crit.	Cr.	7d	17	13	850	3,900	15*	24	$400	0.058	0.00039	$0.029	0

Nahverteidigungswaffe, 92mm (TL6)

CHEM (Smoke)	Crit.	Spcl.	32 yards	20	3	100	800	1/2	30	$450	5.9	0.059	$8.8	1

Note: The calculated accuracy and ranges of the *Nahverteidigungswaffe* are too high. Use it like a mortar with Acc 0 and Max 75.

Name Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
D-10T2S Tank Gun, 100×707mmR (TL6)														
TL7 APDS	Crit.	Cr.	6dx18(2)	30	15	2,550	9,900	1/8	4285	$19,000	42.5	0.43	$650	1
TL7 APFSDS	Crit.	Cr.	6dx20(2)		16	2,550	9,900				42.5	0.43	$1,040	
TL6 HE	Crit.	Exp.*	6dx6[10d]		15	1,700	6,600				51	0.43	$64	
TL6 APCBCHE	Crit.	Cr.	6dx13(2)		15	1,700	6,600				51	0.43	$96	
plus		Exp.*	6d[10d]											
TL7 HEAT	Crit.	Exp.	6dx5(10)		15	1,700	6,600				51	0.43	$390	
PKT Machine Gun, 7.62×54mmR Mosin-Nagant (TL7)														
Solid	Crit.	Cr.	7d	17	12	840	3,900	12	19	$1,400	0.052	0.00035	$0.11	0
AP	Crit.	Cr.	7d(2)		12	840	3,900				0.052	0.00035	$0.33	

Note: The calculated weight of the PKT is too low. 23 lbs. are more realistic.

DShKM Heavy Machine Gun, 12.7×108mm Degtyarev (TL6)

AP	Crit.	Cr.	12d(2)	20	14	1,100	5,400	10	65	$970	0.29	0.0019	$0.39	0

Note: The calculated weight of the DShKM is too low. 74 lbs. are more realistic.

Name Round	Malf	Type	Damage	SS	Acc	1/2D	Max	RoF	Wt	Cost	WPS	VPS	CPS	Ldrs
Rheinmetall BK120-1 Tank Gun, 120×560mmR NATO (TL7)														
Early APFSDS	Crit.	Cr.	6d*30(2)	30	17	3,500	14,000	1/6	4,191	$90,000	41	0.49	$3,520	1
APFSDS	Crit.	Cr.	6d*33(2)		17	3,500	14,000				46	0.49	$3,520	
Late APFSDS	Crit.	Cr.	6d*36(2)		17	3,500	14,000				46	0.49	$3,520	
APFSDSDU	Crit.	Cr.	6d*33(3)		17	3,500	14,000				49	0.49	$5,280	
Late APFSFDDU	Crit.	Cr.	6d*36(3)		17	3,500	14,000				49	0.49	$5,280	
HE	Crit.	Exp.*	6d*15[10d]		16	2,500	9,000				49	0.49	$880	
HEDP	Crit.	Exp.*	6d*8(5)[10d]		16	2,500	9,000				51.3	0.49	$1,320	
Canister	16	Cr.	2d		11	420	1,800				49	0.49	$440	

Notes: The calculated HEDP damage of the BK120-1 is too low. 6dx8(10) plus 6dx8 [8d] is more realistic. The calculated APFSDS damages are slightly too low as well. The calculated maximum range for the APFSDS rounds is far too low. 30,000 yards is more realistic.

Rheinmetall MG3A1 Machine Gun, 7.62×51mm NATO (TL7)

Solid	Crit.	Cr.	7d	17	13	940	4,200	20	19	$1,400	0.052	0.00035	$0.1	0

Note: The calculated weight of the MG3A1 is too low. 22 lbs. are more realistic.

Wegmann *Nebelwurfkörper* Decoy Discharger, 76mm (TL7)

HE	Crit.	Exp.*	6d*4[6d]	14	3	100	1,100	1/4	14	$840	3.7	0.033	$22	1
CHEM (Smoke)	Crit.	Spcl.	22yards		3	100	1,100				2.6	0.033	$16	
CHEM (Hot Smk)	Crit.	Spcl.	22yards		3	100	1,100				4	0.033	$48	

Notes: The calculated accuracy and ranges of the *Nebelwurfkörper* are too high. Use it like a mortar with Acc 0 and Max 75 (50 for HE). The calculated HE concussion damage is too high. Use 5dx2[6d] instead.

Selected Reading

Apart from the relevant **GURPS** books (**High-Tech** and **Vehicles**), we can recommend from the wealth of books on the topic several English-language books for further reference: Chant's *World Encyclopedia of the Tank* (1994) provides a very good overview on the history of tanks, and also many details on individual models. The standard reference on modern combat vehicles, Jane's *Armour and Artillery 1999-2000* (1999), is invaluable for research into any TL7 tank. Information on early tanks is harder to come by, but one commonly available, good book is *AFVs of*

World War One, originally published in 1970, but recently reprinted. The inexpensive *New Vanguard* booklets published by Osprey's are lavishly illustrated and offer much detail, including cut-away drawings. NVG 22 is about the *Panther* family, NVG 24 about the *Leopard 2*. Spielberger wrote the massive *The **Panther** and Its Variants* (1993), which includes everything you could ever want to know about that tank. Culver/Feist's ***Panther** in Detail* (1998) is not quite as completist, but very well illustrated. *Soviet/Russian Armor and Artillery Design Practices 1945 to Present* (1999) by Hull/Markov/Zaloga is currently the standard reference work on Russian tanks. Böhm's *Leopard 2/2A5* (1998) is a cheap and neat full-color booklet with good pictures. Those who want to read more about armored vehicle design and construction should consult Ogorkiewicz's excellent *Technology of Tanks* (1991) and Jane's *AFV Upgrades 1999-2000* (1999).

If you can read German, you will want to acquire Spielberger's "*Waffensysteme **Leopard 1** und **Leopard 2***" (1995).

Interesting web sites include:

"On Armour" http://www.mobilixnet.dk/~mob75281/index.htm for WWII tanks

"Achtung Panzer" http://www.achtungpanzer.com for German WWII tanks

"Kampfpanzer *Leopard 2*"http://home.t-online.de/home/bbgalaxy/leo2a5e.html

"KPZ *Leopard 2*" http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Quarters/5240 for info on the *Leopard 2*.

Pyramid Pick

Battle Line Card Game

Designed by Reiner Knizia

Published by GMT Games

6"x9" box with nine wooden bottle-pawns for flags, 70 cards, and a plastic draw/discard tray; $20.00

Battle Line from GMT Games is a strategy card game by Reiner Knizia for two players that plays in about half an hour. A descendant of the German game *Schotten-Totten*, *Battle Line* is an abstract game of playing cards into sets by color, number, or sequence. With no way to discard and rapidly disappearing positions to play into, *Battle Line* rewards thinking ahead and the Tactics cards keep things lively, making for an interesting game start to finish.

The deck itself is very nice; these are quality cards that shuffle well, and the backs feature classical artwork and border. The faces use artwork apparently borrowed from GMT's *Great Battles Of History* series, featuring clean, accurate drawings of ancient soldiers. There are sixty Troop cards, six colors each numbered one to ten, and ten additional Tactics cards with a different colored back which are drawn from a separate deck.

Players start with a hand of seven Troop cards and alternate placing a single card on their side of one of the nine flags. Each turn after you play a card, you can claim any one flag if you have played three cards on that flag and it can be seen from the visible cards on the table that your opponent cannot complete a better formation. Lastly, you draw a new card, your choice of a Troop card or a Tactics card.

The formations each player tries to form on his side of each flag in order of rank are Wedge (same color, consecutive numbers), Phalanx (same number), Battalion Order (same color), Skirmish Line (consecutive values in any colors), and Host (anything else). Ties are won by the higher total value. The first player to win three adjacent flags (a Breakthrough) or five flags total (an Envelopment) wins.

The Tactics cards introduce that random element that makes war continually surprising. They can remove a key Troop card from a powerful formation or render formation meaningless. Some act as wild cards to complete uncompleteable formations, or allow you to choose your next card. Despite these awesome powers, however, they don't unbalance the game; each effects the outcome of just one flag (or possibly two with Deserter), and only then if played correctly. Additionally, though you can draw as many Tactics cards as you like (in place of Troop card draws), you can play a maximum of one more than your opponent. I have played Tactics cards only to lose the flag in question when my opponent showed flexibility and resource, and I have struggled through the endgame with very few playable cards in my hand after drawing Tactics cards I cannot play since I've already played more than my opponent. As it should be, clever generalship is required to make advantage out of random happenings.

Mid-game finds your opportunities evaporating: there are flags that have already been decided, flags for which you are waiting for the right card, flags where you have played three cards, and flags you will lose with your next card. You find yourself selecting the lesser evil as flags start falling to one side or the other. The player who prepared best in the early part of the game will see things turn out in his favor. The decreasing options and acceleration of flag claims gives a nice climax.

The rules are very nicely written and attractive, filling both sides of one folded sheet. I could find no overlooked game

situation, and diagrams and examples present things clearly. An quick reference on the back or on a separate card showing the ranking of the formations would be the only improvement.

Historical wargamers may be irked that each troop type has only a crude numeric rating, and none of its historical characteristics; Archers have no advantage over horses, chariots have no problem with formed heavy infantry, and elephants don't scare horses, but if this expectation can be set aside the ancient military flavor works very nicely over the color-and-number-based mechanics.

Battle Line's short playing time allows you two or three games instead of one, and can neatly fill that half hour while waiting for the whole group to gather. Simple rules and a quick game make it attractive for non-gamers, and they will enjoy it. *Battle Line* is easy enough for a twelve-year-old to play, and deep enough to keep an experienced gamer wrestling with dilemmas through the final play.

Tips

Don't try to "draw to an inside straight": if you have two cards in sequence you can try to wait for the one that follows or precedes them, but if you have two cards with a gap between them the odds are much lower of filling it. While it's difficult for your opponent to claim a flag where you have played only one card, its actually quite likely when you have two cards down, so think twice before playing that second card. Tactics cards can instantly swing a flag in your favor, so its tempting to draw several; since you may not be able to play them, however, they can take up valuable space in your hand. Conversely, the card backs allow you to see when your opponent has over-drawn Tactics cards in search of a quick fix; consider not playing any yourself to constrict his hand. If you are aiming for a Wedge on one flag and your opponent starts playing junk into that position on the assumption you will win, you can seize it with any color-matched card, opting to beat a Host or Skirmish Line with a Battalion order, relieving you of the need to find the right card and denying him a chance to play a third card, effectively a discard which gives him another draw.

Solitaire

You can build your planning skills with a simple solitaire variant. Shuffle and deal two seven card hands; take one for yourself and put the other on the bottom of the deck. Start playing onto the nine flags normally, drawing after each play. If you fill a second position next to any flag with a card that rules out any formation other than Host you are assumed to have lost that flag and cannot play a third card there. When you have filled all three positions in front of a flag draw one card for the opponent's side of each flag, evaluating them as follows: 10 is a 7-8-9 Wedge, 9 is a 4-5-6 Wedge, 8 is a 1-2-3 Wedge, 7 is a Phalanx of 10s, 6 is a Phalanx of 7s, 5 is a Phalanx of 4s, 4 is a Phalanx of 1s, 3 is Battalion Line totaling 28, 2 is a Battalion Line Totaling 10, and 1 is a Host totaling 21. The imaginary opponent wins ties for a flag, and victory is determined the usual way. You should win half the games.

-- C. Andrew Walters

Pyramid Pick

The Forge Of Fury (for D&D)

Written By Richard Baker

Published by [Wizards Of The Coast](#)

32 pages; $9.95

The second adventure in a series of core adventures, *The Forge Of Fury* does not
directly follow *The Sunless Citadel*. Instead, *The Forge Of Fury* embarks players
with characters of 3rd level on a new mission, with new twists to get them involved.

The Forge Of Fury is an old dwarven stronghold, Khundrukar, that was overrun by orcs years ago. The players have
various methods of hearing about the stronghold, ranging from being hired to retrieve dwarvenworks to finding a map
in a previous adventure. The first few pages are very good at walking new Dungeon Masters through the steps needed
to properly prepare for the adventure. I guess my main question would be, "Why?" This isn't an introductory
adventure, nor is it an adventure for 1st level characters. Like the *Sunless Citadel*, the main focus is on the adventure.
While there is a town nearby the ruins of Khundrukar, there are no maps for it, and the details are minimal. Still, this
doesn't impact the adventure at all.

The ruins of Khundrukar are vast. In a mere 32 pages, Richard Baker manages to throw in four levels of different
monsters. Even more impressive is that these levels aren't small ten-room layouts. Each level is named, and has its own
personality.

The first level, where the players will start off, is The Mountain Door. Here the players will pit their strength against
orcs and their ogre leader. More impressive than the orc threat however, is the personality types that are given to the
NPCs. Dungeon Masters get to play a wide range of characters ranging from lazy orc sentries to an enraged orc
shaman. The second level, The Glitterhame, engages the players with troglodytes, stirges, and giant lizards. One of the
more interesting tricks that the troglodytes have is a trained brown bear. More sinister foes include yellow mold, a very
dangerous encounter for characters of any level. If the players survive the threat of the Grick, a monster with damage
reduction (15/+1), they can descend into the Sinkhole.

With a waterfall and a river, the Sinkhole place might be the perfect area to get away from it all . . . save for the
intelligent roper here. A powerful creature with a Challenge Rating of 10, the roper is perhaps too powerful for the
party to fight. Ironically, the author can't seem to make up his mind. On one hand, he advises that the characters should
seek to avoid the encounter and if they don't, they deserve what they get. In the same section, he advises Dungeon
Masters who know that their group will attack the roper anyway, to omit the encounter. In my opinion, you can't use
the left hand to say that the party deserves what they get and then use the right to take the whole threat away.

Characters who endure the roper can meet the other inhabitants of the Sinkhole, the duergar. I have to tip my hat to the
author, in that there are several named duergar with a few hints on roleplaying them. This makes a new Dungeon
Master's job much easier. Even better though, is that it saves the DM the time of making up names for monsters that
might want to talk to the party. How often have you had to pause the game and think of a name for the monster?

For those who prefer more roleplaying opportunities still, there is the succubus Idalla. Trapped and bound by a wizard
to a single room, she must have a good-aligned character grant her permission to leave, or have a good-aligned
character attack her. This is another case where perhaps the encounter could go very wrong for players. More
important than Idalla's abilities however, are the tales she has for characters. One of the sidebars includes different

rumors that Idalla knows. While most of them are false, there are some interesting things that a DM could run with.

Those party members that insist on moving further into the ruins must seek out the Black Lake. Here they'll encounter one of the classic staples of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game, a dragon. The black dragon, Nightscale, has many advantages in the watery environment and players will have to stay on their toes to defeat her. Still, if they do, they can get their hands on quite a bit of treasure.

The adventure ends with suggestions that deal with the method of how the characters started the adventure. If it was through the map, for example, there is little to do save have the characters go to town and gain fame and fortune. Of course they could find another map . . . If they were hired to find dwarven weapons, they can gain a lot of wealth, but lose some very potentially useful items.

One of the nice things about the adventure is that there is very little wasted space. Following the lead of **The Sunless Citadel**, the adventure packs all the statistics at the end of the book. This saves a ton of space. The book uses two columns and separates the read aloud text from other text by enclosing it in gray space. The font sizes that introduce new sections are moderately sized; there are no massive words to waste space here.

The art is some of the best I've seen in the **d20/D&D** adventures. In addition, Wizards makes use of almost every inch of the paper. The interior covers, for example, have the maps on them. The interior work has important notes boxed off to the side, cutting into the one-inch margins instead of directly into the text. The format is simple and easy to read. Monsters are denoted with a dragon's head, and important information, like doors that don't follow the standard, are marked by a shield.

The encounters start off like *Diablo*. For the most part, the party should walk through the orcs and perhaps have a little difficulty with the ogre, but by the time they get to the dragon, they'll know they've been in a fight. The treasure is also fairly balanced. There are no overwhelming magical items here, but there are a few. There aren't tens of thousands of gold pieces, but adventurers will find some very interesting treasures. Game balance is a fine thing, and having appropriate treasures is a great help to new Dungeon Masters. "What, you mean that +4 sword shouldn't be in this orc's hoard?"

Still, there are some problems. The adventure is directed at new players and new Dungeon Masters. The problem here is that, currently, the market is crowded with such **d20** products, including those by Wizards Of The Coast. There are many references to game rules, but few references to good roleplaying. The worst instance is with the roper. If the party agrees to feed it, say, a captive orc, the monster will let them go. What type of act would that be, to feed an orc captive to an aberration like that? I think that would definitely call for some alignment checks, depending on the characters' beliefs. In addition, there are times when it pits the characters at such a disadvantage that one wonders if they'll be able to survive. The black dragon uses all the tricks in a dragon's repertoire and -- with the environment on her side -- a few more!

The adventure is one of the best value-wise but still not as good a deal as *Dungeon Magazine*. Those who'll get the most out of it are not only new Dungeon Masters, but gamers like myself who are pressed for time and prefer to work with prewritten materials that are easily adaptable to an individual campaign.

-- Joe G. Kushner

Pyramid Reviews

The Agency: Men in Black Dusters (for Deadlands)

Written by John Goff

128 pages; $20.00

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Ghost Busters (for Deadlands)

Written by Lucien Soulban

$15.00

Both Published by [Pinnacle Entertainment Group](#)

The Agency: Men in Black Dusters, by Pinnacle Entertainment Group's John Goff, details the history, workings, and equipment available to members the Agency, *Deadlands'* secret United States government organization directed to contain and cover up supernatural occurrences. *Ghost Busters*, by Lucien Soulban, is an adventure that begins following the near-destruction of Gomorra. The Ghost, the head of the Agency's western bureau, has disappeared and the players are charged or hired to find him. While neither of these books requires the reader to own the other, the two do form a coherent piece when used together. Both books are of high quality and of great potential use for many (but not all) *Deadlands* players and for some players of other horror or conspiracy-based games.

The Agency provides players and gamemasters with a close look at the successor organization to the Pinkerton Detective Agency and how it operates. The book provides an interesting mix of history, operational procedure, and 24 pages of new equipment for Agency operatives. There is information on training and advancement for operatives and guidelines for work in the field. This provides not only roleplaying opportunities for players but gives gamemasters a greater sense of how to create adventures for Agency players or produce more complete Agency NPCs and adventures centering on Agency operations.

This book is not, however, perfect. The Agency is given the Vigenère Code to encode their messages -- a code used by the Confederacy in the actual Civil War and broken by the Union. This seems an odd choice for the US' most secret organization. In fairness to Goff, however, it is a simple enough code to be used effectively in a role playing game. Likewise, the generality of the book, which covers the operations of the Agency throughout the United States, Confederate States, and Disputed Territories, prevents Goff from going into great depth on any one point or location. Although this is not a flaw, readers should also be prepared for some dense material, especially that material provided to organize the bureaucratic information necessary to put together a believable government organization.

Ghost Busters provides such an adventure for players. Soulban has created a suspenseful, dark, and complex challenge. The flow of events will take posse across the Weird West to a number of locations, introducing them to a series of major and minor players in the *Deadlands* world. The challenges presented in the adventure are serious enough to test the skills and abilities of any posse and are well balanced between "thinking" puzzles and combats.

While the adventure will require some tailoring to create a perfect fit for any given posse, the adventure is well written and allows an individual posse to make a real impact on the events of the Weird West by determining if the Ghost will remain a part of their campaign world or not. Pinnacle Entertainment Group will be determining the official events via the results of players. By the time this review appears, however, this decision will already have been made. The results, however, will not force gamemasters to substantially tinker with later material in order to bring it in line with later publications.

Included in this adventure are two sheets of Cardstock Cowboys. Although this reviewer had initial reservations about the usefulness of such an inclusion, they are a helpful and useful addition to the game. Best yet, it is an addition that does not appear to have increased the price of the adventure.

Both publications are worth their price but players and gamemasters should weigh their appropriateness to their own campaign. A campaign based in New Orleans will find **Ghost Busters** of limited usefulness. If one of the posse members is an Agency operative operating under cover in the Big Easy, however, then you will find **The Agency** a useful book.

Those who do not play **Deadlands** will probably not find **Ghost Busters** useful. The alterations required to move this game into another genre or setting would be extensive. **The Agency**, however, may be worth considering. Any game that is based in a horror or conspiracy setting will find some of the information useful for either creating secret organizations or helping expand on such organizations. Earlier publications by Pinnacle Entertainment Group offer conversion rules for the **Call of Cthulhu** and the **World of Darkness** systems. In addition, the upcoming **d20** and **GURPS Deadlands** books will allow Pinnacle's work to be easily moved into other game systems.

-- Matthew DeForrest

Clever Odysseus

by Scott 'Blade' Hamilton

Art by Dan Smith and colored by Keith Johnson

"Tell me, O muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy."
-- The Odyssey, Book I

Odysseus, was one of the greatest heroes of Ancient Greece and of Western Literature. A favorite of Athena, general in the Trojan War and subject of one of the greatest epics of all time, Odysseus was a "master in all ways of contending." And he still is.

History

Odysseus was the son of Laertes and king of Ithaca. An unparalleled tactician and cunning warrior, Odysseus was one of those rare mortals that were born with six Forces. His legendary shrewdness made him a favorite to the goddess Athena, who often came to his aid.

Supporting Cast: Clever Odysseus

The central event in Odysseus' life was the Trojan War and, from what the stories say, Odysseus was wrapped up in almost every facet of it. He was originally one of the suitors for the beautiful Helen and it was he who suggested that Menelaus get the oath of the unsuccessful suitors to protect the marriage, thus requiring they do nothing to obtain Helen for themselves.

It was also to Odysseus that the goddesses Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite came to with the Golden Apple of Discord so that he could choose which of them was the prettiest. Odysseus, being the clever Athenian lad that he was, realized the amount of trouble he could get himself into with this little contest. So he claimed that he could not be objective, being that Athena was his patron goddess. Thus the trio went on to find another judge.

They found a Trojan named Paris and he choose Aphrodite, since Aphrodite promised him the most beautiful woman in the world if he choose her. Thus, Paris absconded with the aforementioned Helen back to Troy and sparking the Trojan War as Menelaus and his oathbound compatriots pursued. Odysseus himself was not in favor of going to Troy. When messengers came to inform Odysseus that Menelaus was calling on his oath, Odysseus pretends to be insane. Only when the messengers put Odysseus' son in danger did he drop the ruse so he could save the life of his son.

At Troy, Odysseus continued to distinguish himself among his comrades, eventually devising the famous Trojan Horse so that the Athenians could sneak into Troy. (For a full history of the Trojan War, see *The Illiad*, by Homer) However, Odysseus was the only of the surviving Athenian heroes not to return after the Trojan War. It took him ten years to return to Ithaca, due to the fact that Odysseus had angered the Greek god Poseidon. The story of what exactly he had to endure is Homer's *Odyssey*, one of the greatest works of ancient Western Literature. For exactly what happened there, you should read the *Odyssy.* Mythweb has both excellent summaries and detailed information (http://www.mythweb.com/odyssey/index.html). Some in Heaven believe his story is actually a chronicle of his travels through the Deep Marches.

Afterlife

After dying, Odysseus found that Poseidon's ill will continued -- he could not pass on to his final reward. He was so fixated on Poseidon's anger that he could not allow himself to ascend to Heaven, nor would Poseidon allow him to serve Athena in the Marches. He became a dream shade and wandered through the Far Marches for millennia, trying to find some way to be allowed into Mount Olympus or to pass onto the Heavens.

His wanderings among the Ethereal plane became just as legendary, and convoluted, as his Corporeal Odyssey had become. Some stories talk of a duel with Laurence in which Odysseus survived by fighting dishonorably. Others describe Odysseus sneaking into Hell to see if he could find Achilles among the souls in Gehenna. Several former Malakim of Purity report seeing Odysseus fighting along the side of the Greek gods during Uriel's Purity Crusade.

What is definite is that the first confirmed report of Odysseus in the Corporeal plane was in the 19th century, when a group of angels conflicted with him as he was attempting to incite a conflict between celestials in Constantinople. Since that time, celestials on both sides have run into Odysseus, usually on the losing end of one of his many schemes.

ODYSSEUS
Dream-shade

Corporeal Forces - 2	Strength 3	Agility 5
Ethereal Forces - 4	Intelligence 9	Precision 7
Celestial Forces - 3	Will 7	Perception 5

   Skills: Language (Ancient Greek)/6, Language (Latin)/2, Language (English)/2, Knowledge (Ancient Greece)/5, Savoir-Faire/5, Fast- Talk/6, Lying/6, Detect Lies/4, Large Weapon/4, Throwing/2, Tactics/4, Drive/3, Dodge/5, Emote/6, Fighting/4, Move Silently/4, Swimming/4, Running/4
   Songs: Tongues (Corporeal/4), Spirit Speech (Corporeal/3), Spirit Speech (Ethereal/2), Motion (Corporeal/1)
   Advantages: Soul Link (to Athena)
   Vessel: Mediterranean Male, Level/2, Charisma/2

Odysseus is, essentially, a dream-shade that has developed himself to 9 Forces the hard way. And he has managed to acquire a vessel somewhere. The list of skills and songs above is merely a starting point -- the GM should feel to change that list as needed and to make Odysseus more appropriate for the setting of the campaign. The general idea is that Odysseus has been around for a long time and has picked up a lot. He should be proficient in all of the little details of life (like driving, using guns, etc.) as well as familiar with the local languages. Only in specialized areas should he be completely out of his element. He is a "master in all ways of contending," after all.

Personality

The most defining characteristic of Odysseus is his cunning. He's not a scholar or philosopher, but rather a clever tactician and an engaging orator. No matter what is going on, Odysseus is trying to find the angle and figure out how to come out on top. He was good enough to impress Athena when he was alive and he's even better now. Almost as pervasive as his cunning is his confidence. Odysseus has been through Hell (some say literally) and come out of all of them (eventually) in one piece. He is adaptable, learns quickly, charismatic, determined and he knows it.

But like most Hellenic heroes, he does have several flaws. His confidence very often inflates into overconfidence. Despite his caution and wit, Odysseus will often gloat or taunt his opponents, leaving himself vulnerable in someway or giving out a critical piece of information. Sometimes he does this intentionally, either to further one of his plots or to just to make sure the game continues -- Odysseus respects worthy opponents and loves a challenge. However, if his continued existence is at stake, he will pull out every stop to get out.

Additionally, Odysseus has some of the worst luck in history. Unfortunate events happen to him frequently, leaving

him stranded, in the clutches of some monster or demon or such. Odysseus is a master of escaping these situations, but his companions usually are not as competent. Thus, Odysseus is usually found working by himself.

Odysseus is still a product of Ancient Greek society. Honor is important (as long as he is still alive to enjoy being honorable). He reacts better to good-looking people and still believes in some ways that truth equals beauty. He also views himself as better than almost all mortals. The fact that he is still legendary is something he is quite proud of.

Running Odysseus

Odysseus can be an NPC in almost any capacity. He works well as a continuing opponent for a group on either side of the War. Or as an ally. Or both at the same time. PCs could get caught up in one of his misadventures, or become pawns in one of his schemes. In any of these cases, you can play him as a dangerous rebel, a misguided hero, or a dashing anti-hero.

As a dangerous rebel, Odysseus is on his own side above all else. Rejected by his gods as well as Heaven and Hell, he only concern is to stay alive and make trouble for those who have wronged him. Odysseus will side with whomever is winning and maximize what he gets out of whatever situation he is in. He will hold a grudge until his Forces are disbanded.

As the misguided hero, Odysseus is just trying to survive and find a way to pass on to his ultimate reward. He is convinced that he must have the permission of Poseidon to pass on, and he is tired of this existence. He values honor and will help those he finds worthy when he can, but will still do what he can to save himself. He will avoid dealing with the Infernal elements unless he knows he can get the upper hand, but will be generally sympathetic to angels unless they antagonize him.

As the dashing anti-hero, Odysseus is a sort of swashbuckler and wandering man-at-arms. His main goal will be to help his patron, Athena, and to convince Poseidon to lift his curse. He a gentleman villain, fighting both sides, but occasionally helping out honorable and competent opponents and pausing to sweep a woman off her feet.

But no matter what happens (unless it is a major plot point), Odysseus should get away to fight another day.

Adventure Seeds

- Odysseus has made a lot of enemies, on all sides of the War. At any point, he may annoy someone enough that they decide that he has to be taken care of. Diabolicals could be sent by any Prince to destroy Odysseus, though Baal and Asmodeus would like to capture him and force him to fight for Lucifer. Angels could be dispatched for similar reasons, but are more likely to be ordered to capture him or at least get him to go away.
- A big Hollywood film company has started filming on a film based off of Homer's *Odyssey*. Not only are several Celestials battling over it, but Odysseus is determined that it go through since a big hit about him would give him a huge boost of essence. Agents of Nybbas may be producing the movie and call in for help with some Ethereal who is trying to steer the plot or affect the production (a la *Phantom of the Opera*). Or other Diabolicals could be sent to sabotage the movie and face Odysseus, who insists that the show must go on.
- A group of angels has been given the task by Michael to find Odysseus and convince him to join the War on the side of Heaven as a sort of special forces irregular. PCs could be the angels in question, or could be angels sent by another Archangel to make sure that their agenda gets taken care of. Dominic would like to see Odysseus destroyed, for instance, while Janus likes having him on the loose -- it keeps everyone on their toes. Whatever happens, Odysseus will lead the angels through a very complex game of cat and mouse. If they are good enough and manage to impress him with their honor and character, he might even consider Michael's offer.
- How Odysseus managed to get a vessel is still a mystery. He claims to have "won" it in a game of skill with a powerful Ethereal spirit. Given Odysseus' track record, it's very likely that the loser didn't take it too well and may be plotting revenge. Odysseus may want to draw the PCs into whatever he is doing in order to confuse the situation.
- Odysseus, in his many wanderings in the Far Marches, found the dream-shade of Iamblicus, an ancient

Pythagorean philosopher and mathematician. Iamblicus had designed a way to focus Essence in an area using the geometric mysteries of Pythagoras, thus creating a sort of artificial Tether. Odysseus sees that as his ticket home if he can get the Tether built and dedicated to Athena or Poseidon. This activity would, of course, attract the interest of other celestials.

The Shadow Over Britain: *King Lear*

"I' the last night's storm I such a fellow saw;
Which made me think a man a worm . . .
As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods.
They kill us for their sport."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* IV:i:35-39

In our previous examinations of the magickal and mysterious side of Shakespeare's plays, we sought meaning: who opened the "wide gap of Time" in *A Winter's Tale,* and why? Who wore the masks, and held up the mirrors, in *Twelfth Night,* and what did they conceal? How do Shakespeare's connections to the worlds of occultism and sorcery (real or surreal) undergird his plays; how does the Great Storyteller shape his stories to twist history itself into a new mold? In *King Lear,* we may find out the answer -- there is no meaning. The gods kill us for sport, love ends in death, and madness stalks the ruined Earth. Shakespeare's cosmic horror: is it warning -- or blueprint?

"I promise you, the effects he writes of succeed unhappily; as of unnaturalness between the child and the parent; death, dearth, dissolutions of ancient amities; divisions in state, menaces and maledictions against king and nobles; needless diffidences, banishment of friends, dissipation of cohorts, nuptial breaches, and I know not what."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* I:ii:155-161

As with *Twelfth Night,* there are two plots in *King Lear.* At play's opening, the 80-year-old Lear prepares to resign his powers and divide his kingdom between his three daughters; Goneril (wife of the Duke of Albany), Regan (wife of the Duke of Cornwall), and Cordelia (unmarried, but soon betrothed to the King of France). When Cordelia refuses to flatter Lear outrageously, he divides her share between Goneril and Regan; she leaves for France with her husband-to-be. Unfortunately, without his powers or lands, Lear has no hold over Goneril and Regan, who ungratefully abuse his servants, strip him of his remaining knights, and finally drive him out of doors onto the heath with only his Fool for company.

Meanwhile, Cornwall's vassal, the Earl of Gloucester, himself has two sons, the legitimate firstborn Edgar, and the handsome bastard Edmund. Edmund convinces his father that Edgar is plotting parricide; Edgar flees as Gloucester orders his death and creates Edmund his heir. Edgar disguises himself as a madman, and meets the now-raving Lear on the heath in the middle of a ferocious tempest. Gloucester defies Regan and Cornwall by rescuing Lear from the storm and then sending him to Dover; for that, the two blind him and taunt him with the fact of Edmund's treachery. The blinded Gloucester must now himself wander the heath, but encounters Edgar, and then Lear, in the camp of Cordelia's French army. She, of course, has returned to rescue her father; the two reconcile.

Regan and Goneril have both now fallen for Edmund; Cornwall was fatally wounded by a servant during his blinding of Gloucester, and Albany has come to hate his wife. However, Albany must oppose the French invasion, and with his aid, Edmund captures Lear and Cordelia in battle and secretly orders their execution. The disguised Edgar now supplies Albany with proof of Edmund's treacherous and adulterous conspiracy with Goneril; after Edmund demands a trial by combat, Edgar slays him. Although Edmund repents while dying, it's too late to save Cordelia; she's been hung, and although Lear has killed the executioner, he dies raving in denial. (Gloucester has also expired, albeit of a heart that "burst smilingly" upon his reunion with Edgar.) Goneril, having poisoned her rival Regan, now kills herself; only Albany and Edgar are left in the wreckage of the "gored state" of Britain.

"Edg. I am no less in blood than thou art, Edmund;
If more, the more thou hast wrong'd me.
My name is Edgar, and thy father's son . . .
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.
Edm. *Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true;*
The wheel is come full circle: I am here."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* V:iii:167-175

Shakespeare took the Gloucester-Edmund-Edgar "echo plot" from an episode in Sidney's Rosicrucian poem *Arcadia,* "The Tale of the Blind King of Paphlagonia." The main plot came from an anonymously printed 1594 play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir,* which borrowed it in turn from Holinshed's *Chronicles,* which took it from Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12th-century *History of the Kings of Britain.* (Geoffrey placed Lear's reign in the 9th century B.C.) Interestingly, all of these sources end their stories happily; Lear and his daughters (and the King of Paphlagonia and his sons) are reconciled and live happily ever after. Shakespeare, as though impelled by ancient forces, returns to the earliest versions of the tale, in which Lyr is the sea-god, and his daughter's marriage to a foreign king ends in death, betrayal, and war.

This earliest version also has two brothers (in this version, half-brothers of Branwen/Cordelia), the twins Nisien and Evnisien. This twin theme (as Shakespeare again invokes his [mirroring](#) effects to heighten unreality and warn us of sorcery) echoes down into the Edmund-Edgar rivalry in *King Lear.* Edmund is evil disguised as good; Edgar is legitimacy disguised as madness. When they fight, it is in a ritual context, and neither gives a name to the herald until one dies. As Edmund betrayed Edgar with a forged letter, so a letter proves his own undoing, and the "wheel is come full circle." It's interesting to note that Goneril's letter to Edmund reaches Edgar after Edgar kills the murderous patsy, *Oswald* -- the prophetic mirror reflects not only the distant British past, it seems.

"For, by the sacred radiance of the sun,
The mysteries of Hecate, and the night;
By all the operation of the orbs
From whom we do exist, and cease to be;
Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood . . ."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* I:i:111-116

But that whiff of sacred king killing is but the appetizer for the orgy of magickal imagery roiling through the play. Lear begins with a ritual division of the land into three parts; when Cordelia breaks the ritual he barks "Come not between the dragon and his wrath." Lear is the Pendragon, the ley-king, but when he unnaturally attempts to put aside his crown, his sacred status as king, from that moment the land is doomed. When he then cuts off his heir, he breaks his own connections to the land's renewal; he curses his other two daughters with sterility, compounding his hubris. He invokes Hecate, but perhaps her sympathies are with the three women, the triple Fates? (Edmund, meanwhile, is affirming his allegiance to the goddess Nature, to the wild Cybele who delights in blood and death and holds no law but that of the pack.) Never mind, he threatens revenges against the "unnatural hags" that "shall be the terrors of the earth" even as he rages against his own "corrupted blood." As he goes mad, a storm of unprecedented fury howls across the skies. Lear attempts to command the thunder and wind, but having put aside or "corrupted" his powers, he cannot stop the forces of chaos and destruction. He decks himself with garlands of flowers; a desperate bid for the goddess' affections, and is rewarded with the death of his daughter and renewed insanity.

"'Tis the times' plague, when madmen lead the blind."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* IV:i:49

Blindness and madness now rule Britain and the world of the play. Edgar, posing as Tom o' Bedlam, discourses on the powers of devils and demons, identifying his own father as "the foul fiend Flibbertigibbet" and telling tales of cannibal giants and the "dark tower." The [Fool](#) prophesies the later prophecies of Merlin, and laments that Lear mistakes his head for his codpiece and his toe for his heart; the spiritual body of the King, like the land of Britain, is disjoint. When Lear and the Fool join Edgar in a hovel on the heath, they create a new triplicity of madmen opposing the three women. The Fool departs when Gloucester joins them, announcing that he'll "go to bed at noon," in a stark admission that the time has come unhinged. (The Fool is then never seen again in the play; perhaps his invocation of Merlin has flung him through the wide gap of time.) Thanks to Lear's madness, Britain has fallen into chaos and magickal space; again, anything can happen; a bastard can rise to nobility or a madman lead the blind.

"These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of nature can reason it thus and thus, yet nature finds itself scourged by the sequent effects: love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide: in cities,

mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked 'twixt son and father."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* I:ii:112-118

These inversions of the natural order were, as it appears, forecast by the "late eclipses in the sun and moon" -- a dangerous omen for a nation ruled by a king who swears "by the sacred radiance of the sun." (As yet more evidence of Edmund's unnatural corruption, he rejects the orderly influence of the planets and the stars.) These eclipses also, intriguingly, give an indication of the play's composition date: in 1605, there was an eclipse of the moon in September, and an eclipse of the sun in October. In November of 1605, of course, came "in palaces, treason;" the Gunpowder Plot against King James I. Interestingly, it's entirely possible that *King Lear* had its debut in May -- before the eclipses. Again we see the warp and weft of history twisting under the dramaturgickal pressure applied by Shakespeare (or the circle of occultists behind him). Why, exactly, then, did James order a command performance of *King Lear* on St. Stephen's Day, 1606 -- the traditional day of Misrule, when the natural order was at its weakest?

"Alas, sir, are you here? things that love night
Love not such nights as these; the wrathful skies
Gallow the very wanderers of the dark,
And make them keep their caves: since I was man,
Such sheets of fire, such bursts of horrid thunder,
Such groans of roaring wind and rain, I never
Remember to have heard: man's nature cannot carry
The affliction nor the fear."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Lear,* III:ii:42-49

Was it in intentional echo of Lear's invitation, or invocation, (after banishing Cordelia) of Saturn, "he that makes his generation messes," in other words, the devourer of his children and destroyer of gods? Saturn, the evil planet -- that governed time. In his rage, Lear demands that the gods "drench our steeples" -- drown the cities in a new Flood. He orders fire and wind, and then cries for "all-shaking thunder" (in parallel with Poseidon, the Earthshaker, and Greek counterpart of -- Lyr) to "strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world" and "crack nature's moulds" -- to destroy the Earth and all life. The play becomes a dramaturgickal recipe for destroying, at the very least, a kingdom -- and potentially, the planet. Some scholars have argued that the intemperate heat and bitter nihilism of the play indicates that Shakespeare was, himself, suffering from syphilitic derangement while composing it. But perhaps a deeper wellspring lies yet untapped.

John Dee (a Welshman) claimed descent from the ancient British kings -- such as Lear, and indeed, Lyr. He had created the British Empire and, like Edmund, had spent time overseas (seven years for Dee, "nine years" for Edmund) and returned to find himself scorned and deprived of his rightful place. Did Shakespeare overhear the almost 80-year-old John Dee deep in converse with the "atheist" School of Night over the translated *Necronomicon*? Did he craft this play as the warning of what an embittered old man, rejected by society, could do -- were he capable of summoning the ancient gods? Or did Shakespeare retell the story of Lyr and the Blind King in service to those gods? Did simply writing down the words eclipse the sun, and set gunpowder treason in motion? Why are the final words of *King Lear* a desperate plea to depart from the script, to "speak what we feel, not what we have to say"? Was the performance, on the day of Misrule, an invocation of another King in tatters and rags -- a King in Yellow? Encore -- and goodnight. Exeunt with a dead march.

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

[Murphy's Rules](#)

Dork Tower!

Dork Tower!

Holiday Adventure Clichés

Greetings, all!

Yes, we've listened to the demands of our faithful audience, and decided to stick around for the holidays. We love you all!

If you happen to be online on Christmas Day, feel free to stop by the *Pyramid* Chat; there's a fair shot I'll be there.

And now, without further ado, our special holiday column.

* * *

I like clichés. I think there's a reason why some themes and stories become "classics." Knowing that your players know the story can give you all freedom to explore -- and break -- standard story elements.

In particular the holidays seem to bring certain stories to the fore time and again. And many of these stories could be plain *fun* to run as adventures. Maybe. I've never done any of these, but what the heck. They seem like good ideas now. (Then again, so did the *Torg* adventure . . .

Here, then, are five holiday mass-media clichés that I might someday inflict on my poor players.

1. It's a Wonderful Life. Taking the cue from the seminal Jimmy Stewart holiday classic (which is odd, since so little of it takes place on Christmas), I've wanted to do an adventure where the characters learn what the world would be like had they never been born. This basic premise is such a classic bit that there are a million permutations to it: What would have happened if . . . the PCs had failed to save the city? The hero decided not to undergo the cybernetic experiment? The young apprentice opted not to pursue his training? (It's also one of the reasons I was interested in the Alternates article from a few months ago.)

But the basic premise -- what would the world be like if a hero (or heroes) hadn't been born? -- seems to have the possibility to be a great adventure. Unfortunately, I've never had the opportunity to fulfil the basic pre-premise of the movie; namely, I've never had anyone play a character that *faced* those sorts of doubts. Likewise I'd need to figure out a way to make it interactive; having the omnipotent narrator merely explain why things went differently isn't much fun. I'd probably have the PCs appear, dazed and disoriented, in the alternate timeline, without a guide; letting them figure out what happened could be most of the fun. (An interesting twist on this idea would be, after this adventure, to have one of the semi-major NPC villains come to the heroes and claim to reform, since he'd been visited by three spirits who showed him the error of his ways.)

Of course, I've also wanted to base an RPG session on one of my *other* Jimmy Stewart favorite classics . . . *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance.* But I'd need a player who was playing a John Wayne-type character.

2. Gift of the Magi. This one would be difficult to initiate as a GM, since most PCs tend not to be that poor. But it would be easy to pull off; all a player would need to say is, "I'm selling X to afford gift Y," and I'd be ready to go.

3. I Believe in Santa. I've always wanted to play a character who, honest-to-goodness, believes in something most of society considers to be foolish. Santa is a classic; the Great Pumpkin is also promising. Ideally it would be some annual event, so those campaigns that span multiple years (of game time) would be able to have some event of annual disappointment . . . and perhaps the merest glimmer of hope. Maybe it could even be an otherwise intelligent, thoughtful man. ("Are you telling me, Dr. Scroggen, that you *honestly* believe the ghost of Thomas Edison visits hard-working scientists every February 11th?")

Besides, if The Tick, Linus, and Cecil Adams can't discount the possibility of some benevolent force, why can't we?

4. The Substitute. Whether it's someone substituting for Santa, a reindeer, top elf, of equal holiday import, it could be an interesting "holiday" adventure to have the characters pinch-hit. It could make an *especially* appropriate *Changeling* or *In Nomine* adventure. (Seraph of Marc in the roll of Santa: "Tell me what you want, little boy." "Um . . . a train set?" "Liar! You want me to find your long-lost mother!")

5. The Inappropriate Christmas Special. Following the examples of classics like *Xena, Star Wars,* and *The Flintstones,* I've wanted to have a "Christmas" special set in an inappropriate setting. Perhaps a ***Ravenloft*** special, or a ***GURPS Conan*** Christmas special. Or mayhaps ***Call of Cthristmas.*** Regardless, I'd like to play it totally straight, ideally even getting the players into the spirit of things. Then, when they go home after having had a good time, they realize, "Hey! Why the heck were the Alpha Centaurians celebrating *Christmas*?!?"

And make sure you don't miss "Spirit in the Sky!", the second issue from the first *Star Trek: The Next Generation* comic mini-series (reprinted in *Star Trek: The Next Generation: Beginnings*). Er . . . no, wait. You probably want to miss it.

All told, the holidays are meant for spending time with loved ones, being good to each other, and having fun.

Not, in many ways, unlike gaming.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: **GURPS Prisoner**, pp. 4-5.

(Three stars) " 'Yes, let's burn these old toys. I don't know why I kept them.' "

fnordy fnordy fnord!

Reviews of Gameable ~~Fiction~~ Fact

The Howdunit Series

Published by [Writer's Digest Books](#)

Reviewed by Alexander Johnston

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By now most of you should be finding this format awfully familiar . . . and you are right to be suspicious. With the exception of game mechanics, these books are structured almost *exactly* like gaming sourcebooks, right down to sidebars and story seeds. In fact, the main criticism I have of these books is that, while they provide a broad introduction to their subject matter, they are sparse on exactly the kind of details that a determined reader might pick up on in a novel -- which is a weakness when writing for reality obsessed mystery fans, but the perfect level of detail for busy GMs.

Certainly there are some differences between these books and gaming sourcebooks. The biggest difference being that the authors are *uniformly* professionals in the fields they are addressing; when they editorialize, their experience certainly qualifies them for it. Interestingly, one of the most common themes of their editorializing is the debunking of common myths propagated by screenwriters and authors, and the best of the Howdunit authors will provide more realistic alternatives that drive the plot in the same way as the prevailing myth.

However, the books do have their share of problems. Again and again one is aware of the shallow scope of the books. Although the overviews and insights are valuable, they often give a bare minimum of details. They offer more than most GMs would need to know about broad areas of law enforcement, but I periodically found myself just getting interested in the details of a forensic technique or legal process when the book abruptly changed subject.

Having commented on the series in general, allow me to consider select titles in greater depth. I should say here that I have not read every book in the series, but these comments concern ones I have read and I feel are a representative sample. To help you decide which of them to check out, I have chosen two I thought were excellent gaming resources and one I felt was not, and tried to explain why.

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by Dmitri Scull

Art by Christopher Shy

The standard Venom Advantage for *GURPS* works beautifully, up to a point. While it admirably covers many toxins and corrosive attacks, it does have some weaknesses, and does not manage to describe many real-world venoms very well; especially toxins normally found only in invertebrates, plants, or fungi. In addition, many creatures have, instead of an actual venom, a virulent symbiotic disease; for which the Venom Advantage is inappropriate.

The following Advantages are racial Advantages specifically for such races; also included is the Strong Jaws Advantage, as the Disease Carrier Advantage is especially appropriate for scavenger races, who while not specifically needing Sharp Teeth, should have a better bite attack than normal.

Note that much of the new material is an addition to the Venom Advantage; for clarity's sake, the original Venom rules are included as part of the revision. Note that there are a couple of new Enhancements as well, especially ones that can be used to create combined venoms (such as a poisonous toxin that acts as an anaesthetic as well).

Anti-Coagulant Venom   *30 points*

The venom the character possesses is a particularly nasty one; any wounds from the envenomed attacks are treated as if the victim had the Hemophilia Disadvantage. Once the wound has been bandaged, it will heal normally, but until it is bandaged, it will continue to bleed.

Disease Carrier   *5/10 points*

The character is a carrier for some virulent disease. The character will not infect himself, but can contract other diseases (unless he or she has the Immune to Disease Advantage). If the character is assumed to be suffering from the disease, he should take an appropriate Disadvantage. For 5 points, the disease will only be transmitted by some form of close contact, usually from a natural attack such as a bite or claw attack. A victim of the attack must make a HT roll (for each wound) or suffer the effects of a serious, but not lethal illness (GM's choice). For 10 points, transmission is airborne; anyone around the character must make a HT roll once per day or contract the disease; the character's natural attacks still carry the infection. Individuals with Immune to Disease are (naturally) immune.

- *Special Enhancement:* The disease is especially virulent; HT rolls are at -5; +5 points.
- *Special Enhancement:* The disease is fatal; +10 points.
- *Special Enhancement:* The disease is magical in nature, and can infect even those who are immune to disease, depending on the special effect of that advantage; +10 points.

Strong Jaws   *3 points*

The character gains an effective bite attack. Damage is still crushing, but is now calculated using the character's full ST score.

Venom   *15 points/level*

You secrete a venom that can be delivered by various means. Types of venom include:

Venoms With Bite

- *Anesthetic:* Rather than causing direct damage, the venom numbs the target; each level of the venom costs the victim 1d points of DX; at 0 DX, the victim is too numb to move. Anesthetic victims must enter the blood to work; else they must be bought as Contact Agents. If the character succeeds in a HT roll, no DX is lost, but the HT roll is at a penalty equal to the number of levels of venom, and a cumulative -2 for each injection after the first.
- *Corrosive:* Such as acids and digestive enzymes; these venoms do damage quickly, and on contact (there is no need to buy the Contact Agent enhancement for Corrosive venoms). They do 1d of damage per level on the first turn of contact; on each subsequent turn the venom does 1d less damage until no damage is done. Armor protects at full DR on the first round, but loses 1 DR each round. Objects, including armor, are similarly damaged. There is no HT roll to avoid damage from a corrosive venom.
- *Hallucinogenic:* These venoms, rather than harming the target directly, cause wild hallucinations. Needless to say, this can be potentially more dangerous than other types of venom, but it still must enter the bloodstream. The target must make a HT roll to avoid the effects (at a penalty equal to the number of levels of venom, and at a cumulative -2 for each injection after the first). If the HT roll is failed, the victim will hallucinate for 1d minutes per level of the venom.
- *Irritant:* The venom does not kill or knock the target out, but drives the target away or incapacitates him; if inhaled, delivered to the eyes, or injected, the victim must make a HT roll (at a penalty equal to the level of the venom) or take 1d-4 damage and be incapacitated for 1 turn per level of the venom. Each turn of incapacitation, the victim may make a Will roll (at a penalty equal to the level of the venom) in order to recover.
- *Lethal Paralytic:* These venoms kill by paralyzing the diaphragm and heart; they are rather deadly. Even if they do not kill you, you will become paralyzed by the attack. The venom must be injected into the blood, but once it is, the victim must make a HT roll (at a penalty equal to the number of levels) or take 1d damage per level of the venom. If the victim survives, he is paralyzed for 1d hours per level of the venom. If the HT roll is made, a second HT roll must be made (at the same penalty) or the victim is still paralyzed for 1d minutes per level of the venom. Lethal Paralytic venoms are considered a +50% Enhancement.
- *Lethal Poisonous:* These venoms are similar to ordinary Poisonous venoms, except that there is no immediate damage. However; the damage if the HT roll is failed is 3d per level of the venom, and even if the HT roll is made, the victim still takes 1d damage.
- *Necrotic:* This venom works almost identically to the poisonous venom; however, HT rolls are made by the day rather than the hour, and all damage is applied to the location where the poison was introduced until the location is destroyed; then the next location adjacent begins to take damage (moving inwards). Limbs crippled (or worse) by Necrotic venoms generally must be removed; however, this will stop the poison if done before the damage

"migrates."

- *Paralytic:* These venoms paralyze rather than kill; they must be introduced into the blood, then the victim must make a HT roll (at a penalty equal to the number of levels of venom) or be paralyzed for 1d hours; if the roll succeeds, a second HT roll (at the same penalty) is required, or the victim has a penalty of -1 per level of venom on all rolls (this is not cumulative, but it does apply to HT rolls to avoid paralysis).
- *Poisonous:* These venoms must be introduced into the bloodstream; once poisoned, and every hour thereafter, the victim must make a HT roll (at a penalty equal to the number of levels of the Venom advantage) or take 1d damage per level of the venom. Once the victim succeeds in a HT roll, no further rolls are needed.
- *Soporific:* These venoms knock the victim out, rather than causing any real harm. They must be introduced into the bloodstream; once injected, the victim must make a HT roll (at a penalty equal to the number of levels of venom) or take 1d Fatigue damage per level of the venom; when ST reaches zero, the victim is rendered unconscious. Soporific venoms are considered a -33% Limitation.

Venom Enhancements and Limitations

- *Special Enhancement:* Any venom (other than Corrosive venoms, which are already such) can be defined as a contact agent, which absorbs through the skin; contact agents cannot be washed off. +70%.
- *Special Enhancement:* The venom may be delivered at range (spit, squirted, etc.). This is a ranged attack, based on DX, with SS 12, Acc +12, ½D n/a, and Max 5. Corrosive venoms work normally; other venoms must strike open wounds or mucous membranes (or be defined as contact agents) in order to work. +35%.
- *Special Enhancement:* The venom may be sprayed as a cloud of mist. The cloud covers 3 hexes (they must be adjacent to each other and at least one must be adjacent to you) and lasts 1d turns. +100%.
- *Special Enhancement:* The venom (which cannot be a Soporific) has an additional soporific effect in addition to its normal effects. This is normally bought for Anesthetic, Hallucinogenic, Paralytic, or Poisonous venoms. +50%.
- *Special Enhancement:* The venom has an additional effect (other than Soporific or Lethal Paralytic; Soporific venoms cannot take this Enhancement, although Lethal Paralytic venoms can) in addition to its normal effects. Venoms combined with Corrosive venoms enter the bloodstream if they do damage. This is commonly used to create Poisonous Corrosive effects or venoms with Anesthetic effects to mask their true nature. +100%.
- *Special Limitation:* You sweat your venom; it cannot be delivered actively except by grappling or being bitten. -70%.
- *Special Limitation:* Your flesh delivers the venom; it is only delivered if you are bitten. -100% (keep in mind the 20% minimum cost, though).

Pyramid Review

Gemini RPG

Published by Cell Entertainment

Written by Johan Sjoberg and Stefan Ljungqvist

240 pages; $30.00

Most American gamers have probably never heard of *Gemini*. This is because most of the games that we play over here are American ones. Many gamers probably never stop to think about the fact that there is an entire continent of gamers across the ocean, all gaming away just the way we do (we're talking about Europe here). Most of them just go about their business playing their American stuff and assuming that the term "foreign game" means a non-English translation of an American one.

Well, the truth is that there are plenty of other games out there, and *Gemini* is a great example of one that is ever-so-slowly creeping its way onto American gaming tables. It hails from Sweden and brings with it a style similar to our own, yet at the same time unique unto itself.

The main theme of *Gemini* is a great religious war. It is set in a world called Gemini, which is very similar to medieval Europe. The major player in this world is The Church of the One, a religious organization based very strongly upon the Roman Catholic Church of medieval Europe. The Church exists to provide order for men's lives and to fight back the forces of the Darkness. Unfortunately, things aren't going so well.

Until recently, the Darkness had been kept imprisoned behind the mystical forces of the Iron Gate. Well, the gate has been opened, and the Darkness is now setting out upon the land to corrupt mankind and overthrow the Church. Even worse, the leading sovereigns of a bunch of Gemini's kingdoms decided that they'd had enough of the Church and rebelled against it a little while ago. So the Church isn't exactly standing in a firm position of power right now. Add to this mix the nations of the elves and the dwarves, both of which are in their own state of disorder, and you have quite a lot of room for adventure.

Overall, the game world is very rich with detail and full of dramatic and well fleshed-out characters. The author has really managed to give the game a certain flavor, which usually isn't quite as distinct in its American counterparts. Instead of giving the game a heavy fantastic tone, the author has given it a heavy mythic tone. The world itself is very much like real medieval Europe. Most folks are just normal people who will never witness a wizard casting a spell, a demon taking shape before them, or anything else of the like. They just go about their lives and confide in the protection and wisdom of the church. Although elves, dwarves, and demons are incorporated into the game, it shies away from any other fantastic races or creatures (no dragons, etc.). The central conflict is that of evil versus good, and how mankind is caught in the middle of it.

The characters of the game capture that mythic tone, but with a true epic feel. These are not ordinary people; they are the shapers of nations. We meet corrupted men such as the Dark Martyr Cyrus, the evil messiah appointed to lead the apocalypse for the Darkness; we also meet his henchmen, the forsaken Marquis Lazarus and the dark elf Malachdrim. The characters have dramatic backgrounds that are drawn out very well. There are good guys too, although they are quite the underdogs. One of the primary plots of the game is a quest by both the Church and the Darkness to find a boy who is the living incarnation of the One, the person who will eventually save them from the Darkness. The child is a mystery, but the man seeking him out is well described. Unfortunately, he's not the sword-swinging knight that you would expect. In fact, he's an old, blind monk who wanders the world alone in his quest. The good guys indeed have it

cut out for them in this game.

Being that *Gemini* is labeled a dark fantasy game, it takes a very gothic approach to things. And we're not talking gothic here in the ***Vampire: The Masquerade*** sense. No, we're talking gothic in the *gothic* sense, meaning the old-school traditional sense (picture cathedrals and tales of Faust). Most games that attempt this fall short at least just a bit, but our Swedish creators here have really managed to hit it on the head. This makes the game a great alternative for those interested in a dark fantasy game with a slightly different feel.

The prime method for developing this atmosphere is through the heavily developed plot, the rich characters, and the author's overall tone; the artwork itself also adds a great deal to the game. The layout has been done in a manner that reflects the game material well; the pages are surrounded by a lattice work pattern that one would easily expect to find on the side of a cathedral or similar Gothic structure. (It should be noted that the designers used uneven columns in the layout, which many won't mind, but is bound to displease a few readers.) The artwork is simply magnificent. All of it is very dark and captures the gothic feel of the game expertly. The haunting portraits of some of the major characters bring them to life more chillingly than any of the author's words possibly could have. The one drawback is that the paintings are spread unevenly throughout the book, leaving large expanses of text in between with very little illustration.

We must take a quick second here to make note of the translation. For the most part, the translation into English is very good. The English is smooth and reads better than even a lot of American texts do . . . but there are exceptions. The most notable is the introduction, which is translated very poorly. Don't let this opening section deter you from the rest of the book. The only other problems are an occasional word misuse here and there, but I doubt if most readers will notice any of them (they are subtle).

The game's die system, unfortunately, isn't quite up to the quality of its story line and setting. The basic system uses a d20 and has one use it to roll under a chance of success (CS), which is determined by adding several stats and other factors ogether. While it involves a bit of adding, this basic system is okay; it is, in fact, pretty smooth. But it gets complicated from there. First, players must keep careful track of the exact number by which they beat their CS, as it is oftentimes used later when determining effect. This isn't too bad, but then we get to combat.

The author has come up with an interesting system for combat, whereby the combatants choose a combat strategy: defensive, offensive, or feint. Then everyone rolls their initiative and checks this handy chart and compares the attacker's style versus the defender's style to see what happens. It looks neat at first, but it's really a pain in the butt. The system is very static, meaning that combat is forced into a kind of attack-parry, attack-parry rhythm. The strategy system also isn't highly compatible with the base die system. It's almost as if they just laid one system on top of another. What's worse is that the author tells us that not all combatants get to use the strategy system, but gives us no way of handling the two types together. So, if someone uses a combat strategy against an opponent who doesn't, we aren't really told how to handle it.

On the other hand, the combat system does have a few perks. Damage is not determined randomly. Weapons have a fixed damage modifier, and the amount of damage done is determined based on the success level of the attack. The game also uses a wound system (meaning that it uses wound levels instead of hit points) that takes physical stamina into account a little bit better than some systems.

The magic system is kind of a mixed bag. It uses a very open-ended system, where the players are given the basic aspects (e.g. forms) of magic and are able to combine these freely to create their own spells. Open systems like this are interesting and a lot of fun to use because they get the players involved on a whole new level. They're not easy to do, however, and this one falls far short of being balanced. Within the confines of the story, magic is balanced very well. It is powerful, but very rare. It is only mastered by those black of heart and favored by the forces of the Darkness, so most people don't ever see it. System-wise, however, there is almost nothing to throw it into check. There is very little to keep one from learning magic, and, aside from their die roll difficulty, there's nothing to keep a magician from casting extremely high level spells. While some GMs might be able to handle this without a problem, others could have quite a bit of trouble.

Another lacking area is the powers of the clergy. As the story is set up, the power of The Church of the One is

described as the only thing capable of fighting the forces of the Darkness. Unfortunately, when it comes to the game system, the Church is given relatively little to play with. Sure, they are able to heal, perform exorcisms, and wield powerful relics, but most of the bonuses are small and simple. When compared to the fantastic might of the magic wielded by the forces of Darkness, the Church's powers seem weak indeed. It would be nice if the good guys had been given a little more to play with.

One minor aspect of the game system that's pretty interesting is alignment. Alignment, while rated solely on a scale of good or evil, is a fluid thing, capable of change -- an aspect that seems rather realistic, because people themselves change. It can be changed by major events, players' actions, or even through experience points (at the narrator's option).

Despite the major kinks in the game system, *Gemini* still remains a pretty good game. Players and GMs who have too much trouble reworking clunky systems might want to avoid it, but it is a great alternative for those looking for something a little different in a gothic vein. The game's distinctive setting and strong development make it too interesting to simply pass up. The only real problem is going to be in finding a copy of it, as not too many American distributors have picked it up yet.

-- Jon Thompson

Pyramid Pick

Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness

A Companion Volume for Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play

Published by [Hogshead Publishing](#)

Written by Graeme Davis, Anthony Ragan, Mike Brunton, Ken Rolston, Marcin Segit, Iain Smedley, Paul Murphy, Philip Wells and Lewis Page

Cover by John Blanche

Illustrated by Ralph Horsley, John Keane, Rik Martin, Bunny Smedley, Annelise Johnsen, Tony Ackland, John Blanche, John Bolton, Paul Bonner, Kev Walker, Russ Nicholson, Gallagher and H

128 pages; $14.95

Since acquiring the license from Games Workshop in 1994, Hogshead Publishing have been slowly but steadily reprinting old material and publishing a little new for what must be the most popular of British RPGs, *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play*. *Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness* is a sequel to 1995's *Apocrypha Now*, Hogshead's first companion volume for *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play* (WFRP). Unlike *Apocrypha Now*, which contained only reprint material (though no less useful), *Apocrypha 2* contains new stuff as well as old. This, of course, makes it of interest to *WFRP* fans who already have the reprints, as well as those who don't.

Both the title of *Apocrypha 2* and its cover by John Blanche are an amusing reference to *Apocrypha Now*. Inside, the contents are well laid out and illustrated by a range of new artists for the new material, with mostly the original artwork for the reprints. Of the new art, that by Ralph Horsley, John Keane, and Rik Martin all stand out. The quite diverse contents are spread over twenty-one chapters, collated into five roughly themed sections. At the beginning of each section, a flyer, done in mock Shakespearean-style (like *Shakespeare in Love* but without the bit with a dog -- that's been promised for the forthcoming *Empire in Chaos,* the fifth and final part of the *Enemy Within* campaign), announces that section's contents.

Section one is called "Crime and Punishment," focusing upon the former more than the latter. Graeme Davis expands the rules for that mainstay of every thief - the art of picking pockets, as well as giving new rules and careers for Beggars. Ralph Horsley's art really makes these two chapters come alive. The *WFRP* rulebook lists only two spells specific to the Cult of Ranald, the god of thieves, so the six here by Marcin Segit are most welcome. Finally, Anthony Ragan, who created the infamous prison of Rijker's Island in *Marienburg: Sold Down The River,* explores the history of prisons in The Empire and details four examples -- though one does lie outside The Empire far to the South. The author also makes suggestions on how prisons can be used within the game and provides three detailed adventure ideas for the GM to run. If you consider the nefarious nature of an adventurer's life, then they going to fall foul of the law sooner or later and so this section contains some useful material before and after their life of crime!

Death is the subject of Section Two (all penned by *WFRP* co-creator, Graeme Davis) and in particular how society in the Old World deals with it. Primarily, death is the concern of the Cult of Mórr. To the average citizen, Mórr is represented by the Mourner's Guild, which oversees all funerals. This section examines the guild, but also the cult's more militant arm, The Knights Raven, which actively prosecutes practitioners of the necromantic arts. Discussed from both the GM's and player's side, the Cult is presented as an interesting choice of career for those players not wishing to follow either Sigmar or Ulric. Besides this, we have a description of new spells for use with the Cult; how the law deals with death; a description of a funeral home in Marienburg and five graveyard encounters that need just a little fleshing out.

Section Three is about people and places, the majority of which have been reprinted from *White Dwarf* magazine. Otto's Printworks describes a Marienburg printer and is accompanied with a short encounter with some non-Chaos cultists. Of more use to players is the magical item identification service offered by The Vermillion Pawn. Magical items can also be purchased from the shop, which does cheapen magic a little in *WFRP,* but the items on sale are all pleasingly expensive and quite specific in their use. For rural encounters there is Morbog's Marauders, a mixed band of Orc and Goblin mercenaries. These should just about test the mettle of any player party and they are well written up. Completely new is The Pandemonium Carnival, a travelling circus that can be encountered anywhere. This is described in depth, coming with several ideas for inserting it into a game, and is nicely illustrated by Rik Martin The section is rounded out with the game details for Gotrek and Felix, the Dwarven slayer and his human scholarly companion from several of the Warhammer novels.

The fourth section is comprised of four diverse entries, two major and two minor. The latter are pieces on "Archery And Enchantment," and "Puddlefoot's Common Herbal," which adds more herbs to the game. Of particular use to the players is "What a Character" reprinted from the *WFRP Character Pack*. This presents a series of tables for adding more depth to character during creation -- not just the usual eye and hair colour, but names, place of birth particular to the Old World and family background. Although geared towards human characters, it also covers the Dwarf, Elf and Halfling races. Just as useful, but more for the GM is "Lifting The Veil," an examination of the art of divination in the Old World. Although careers are given for the various types of diviners, I don't recommend that the players take them up, as the arts are potentially rather dangerous -- particularly if you really succeed or really fail! Various means of divining are discussed (cards, dice, palmistry and astrology, amongst others) and given rules for, providing the GM with an excellent tool for use in their campaigns.

The fifth and final section contains four adventures, two of which can be slotted into *The Enemy Within* campaign, but are not specific tied into it. "The Ritual" calls upon the players to investigate a murder that lands literally at their feet after a night out on the town, and thus least well-equipped to do so! "The Affair Of The Hidden Jewel" is a tale of double crosses and daring do, influenced perhaps by Robin Hood. The other two adventures can be slotted with relative ease into the *Doomstones* campaign (the third and final part of which is due for release shortly). "Ironstone Pass" is a tough ambush encounter that can be run at anytime, whereas "Deep Trouble in Karak-Zulvor" is best run between the actual *Doomstones* adventures. Deep Trouble is probably the weakest of the four adventures here, leaning towards the dungeon bash end of the *WFRP* game, but that said it is well written and gives the players some interesting challenges to overcome.

Unlike some companions, which can be somewhat hit or miss, *Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness* is definitely more hit than miss. The misses are really the adventures, as they have little usefulness once played, though that is the curse of all such beasts. The hits are the section of death -- the articles on the Cult of Mórr should be most useful, as will the articles on thievery, begging and divining. Alongside these articles are lots of suggestions for adventures, but any good *WFRP* GM should be thinking up his own, just by reading the hits I've described. That is, of course, testament to Hogshead's high standards.

All-in-all, *Apocrypha 2: Chart of Darkness* is an excellent addition to *Warhammer Fantasy Role-Play* and every *WFRP* GM should have this on their shelf.

-- Matthew Pook

by Matt Riggsby

Art colored by Keith Johnson

One of the first questions many adventurers will ask when they start dealing with a new country or group of people is "Who's in charge?" The correct answer might be "In charge of what?" Even if player characters aren't directly involved in politics, their society's political scene can be the source of constant adventures. This article provides a sort of checklist of ideas for GMs to use in order to construct realistic power blocks in a society and use them in adventures.

Power and Where It Comes From

Briefly put, political power is the ability to get people to do something whether they want to or not; politics is the process of getting them to do it. Power can come from a variety of sources, each with its own advantages and limitations. A government is only part of a political picture.

Religious groups, companies, private organizations, political parties, social classes, and the general public may have power as well. Even groups whose individual members appear powerless may form powerful coalitions. For example, farmers and factory workers are individually weak. However, if they can organize, they can use their vital role as producers of food, manufactured goods, and tax revenues as an extremely powerful weapon.

When defining powerful groups and institutions in a society, the GM should determine what means they can use to exercise their power. Major sources of power include:

- **Religious authority:** A perceived or actual connection to powerful supernatural entities. This may include divinely transmitted authority over other mortals or hidden esoteric or "higher" knowledge.
- **Military power:** The ability to use brute force, particularly against large groups of people.
- **Legislative and bureaucratic authority:** The ability to set rules for society and direct the machinery of the state against offenders through such devices as tax collectors and law courts. Although bureaucracy has become synonymous with inefficiency, remember that bureaucracy is one of the hallmarks of civilization. No government can be effective without a body of officials making sure that laws are enforced and taxes are paid.
- **Status:** Connection to a group generally acknowledged as the natural and legitimate leaders of society (e.g.: Roman patricians or the Brahmin caste).
- **Wealth:** Direct control over production and/or distribution of material goods or services. This can also include control over specialized information or proprietary technology.

Exceptional abilities, such as magic, psi, or super powers, are likely to function as either military power or wealth.

Any powerful group is likely to partake of each in some way. Historically, members of ruling classes have usually been rich, members of traditionally powerful families, and leaders of armies, and they are often intimately connected to their society's religious hierarchy and bureaucratic apparatus. However, most powerful groups have their power

ultimately rooted in one particular area. A powerful church may have vast wealth and the ability to call out troops, but its primary source of power is its religious authority. If its religious authority were to decline, so would its wealth and its overall power.

On the other hand, several different groups within a society can simultaneously hold power in different ways. The powerful groups of the late Middle Ages are a good example. Many parts of Western Europe saw four powerful groups: the Catholic church (whose power was based on religious authority), a largely rural nobility (who formed the bulk of the military, and were members of a high-status class to boot), kings (who were, at the time, increasingly powerful due to their role as legislators at the head of growing bureaucracies), and a growing class of urban merchants (who derived their influence from nothing except their enormous wealth).

Not all of the factors need be in play at once. For example, the late Roman Republic saw several different powerful groups: a patrician Senate, powerful warlords from all social classes, and wealthy "new men" risen from the lower social classes. But while each group had its own religious ties, there was no overtly religious faction, nor did any of them seek overtly religious goals. Likewise, many cyberpunk societies have no effective legislators or courts, only economically and militarily powerful corporations, crime syndicates, and other private organizations.

Factions

Having decided where power is coming from, the GM should go on to identify sources of conflict between and within powerful groups, as well as tensions between those in power and those out of it. People with similar backgrounds will, naturally, have common interests, which will inevitably run contrary to the interests of others. People with common interests will join together for protection and advancement, forming factions. Conflicts between and within factions are, arguably, responsible for most political activity and social change in a society. Factions can arise for any number of reasons, but here are some social tensions that have caused factional problems:

- **Religion vs. religion.** Not all religions will give rise to factional conflict. The permissive brands of paganism in many ancient societies gave little reason for explicitly religious dissension. However, over the past two thousand years, religion has become a major motivation or at least a plausible pretext for violent disagreement (Christianity vs. Islam vs. Judaism in Europe and the Near East, conflicts between Muslims and Hindus in India). Doctrinal disagreements within a religion are responsible for at least as much conflict as differences between religions (Protestants vs. Catholics in Western Europe, Iconoclasts vs. Iconophiles in the Byzantine Empire). A subset of religious conflict is conflict between secular and religious interests. Modern religiously motivated groups worldwide have taken governments and cultural trends to task for championing what they see as immorality, and have even taken on secular governments and won, as in Iran in the 70s. Religious groups already have objections to cloning and genetic engineering, and artificial intelligence is likely to cause controversy as well.
- **Rural vs. urban.** Farmers and country landlords may feel threatened by urban economic development and distrust arrogant city-dwelling merchants and industrialists, regarding them as city slickers of questionable honesty. City dwellers may in turn consider their rural cousins as bumpkins, only a half-step above their livestock.
- **Class vs. class.** This is conflict between social classes, not economic classes, although it can have an economic dimension. Peasants and the lower urban classes always chafe under the yoke of their lords and rulers, but nouveau riche merchants and tradesmen may also resent the ancestral (and therefore, to their mind, unearned) privileges enjoyed by the traditional upper classes. The upper classes, of course, are terribly concerned with the rise of the lower classes, regarding the status quo as a clearly superior and proven arrangement.
- **Racial and ethnic conflict.** Conflicts between ethnic groups were relatively rare in antiquity, if only because travel and emigration on a large scale did not yet exist and identification with a particular ethnic group was rarely as strong as it often is today (without a visible Them, there's little reason to be strongly attached to Us). The modern world, however, sees communities of racial or ethnic minorities in every major city. Since the minority looks, speaks, or acts differently from the majority, it follows that there will be tension between the two groups. Alternatively, a society might occasionally see attacks on foreigners of all kinds, regardless of their homeland (as during China's Boxer Rebellion). Alien species, of course, qualify as ethnic groups, as do fantasy

races like elves and dwarves, and while the possibility is often overlooked by science fiction authors, aliens may themselves have ethnic subdivisions.

- **Regional rivalry.** A relative of ethnic conflict. Residents of a particular area might think of themselves as superior to or at least different from residents of another region, even if they appear fairly similar to outsiders (e.g.: northern and southern Italians, northern and southern Californians). This rivalry may be the expression of economic or political interests common to the residents of each region. There may even be subtle rivalries between neighborhoods of a city, usually expressed as constant attempts to outdo the rival in civic sporting events, public celebrations, conspicuous acts of charity, and the like. Centuries-old neighborhood rivalries are still carried on in Sienna's famous horse race, the Palio.
- **Exceptional Powers and Technological Enhancement.** Magicians, psis, superheroes, and the genetically or cybernetically enhanced may end up in new quasi-ethnic groupings. Those whose abilities are naturally superior or have been enhanced by technological means may divide into factions along lines related to the source of their abilities (for example, cyborgs vs. psis), or arbitrary factions for other reasons. While those with superior abilities may be powerful enough to form a dominant political faction, they're just as likely to form their own factions or join existing ones. For example, most Marvel comic books address the activities of super-powered mutants in a world where mutants are a despised minority. The mutants are divided among a number of factions ranging from separatists to mutant supremacists to those who want to assimilate into "normal" human society.
- **Wealthy vs. poor.** Conflicts between the haves and the have-nots are at least as old as civilization. This conflict is particularly heightened during times of economic hardship.
- **Ancestry.** In most societies, the strongest loyalties are familial. Two or more families might find themselves in conflict over issues of family honor stemming from offenses (possibly imagined or exaggerated) that occurred generations earlier. Feuds can continue for generations until one side or the other is defeated or, rarely, a later generation makes peace.
- **Professional rivalry.** Members of different trades or unions may fight with one another for control over various enterprises. For example, the carpenters' guild may fight with the sailors' guild to determine who controls shipbuilding, or the Teamsters and UAW might battle over which union absorbs which trades. In an ultra-tech setting, jump-gate manufacturers may carry on a rivalry with warp drive shipyards.
- **Fandom.** Popular artistic or sporting figures (or, indeed, charismatic religious figures) may acquire large followings. In low-tech societies, such factions are likely to be specific to particular cities, where enough fans can gather in one place to make a difference, or to members of a particular class, ethnicity, or other small group. However, as travel and communication become easier, fan organizations can span the world. Most of the time, these factions will do no more than cause minor periodic violence, such as riots caused by soccer hooligans. However, fans can have political leanings and make a remarkable impact on their society. In 532 AD, chariot-racing fans in Constantinople started a riot that ended with a third of the city in flames and imperial troops forcibly suppressing street fighting. More often, there is low-level tension between groups of fans, expressed as contempt on both sides (mods vs. rockers, fans of *Deep Space Nine* vs. fans of *Babylon 5*). Such conflicts may appear utterly incomprehensible to outsiders. Indeed, they may be unable to tell the sides apart.
- **Political and philosophical differences.** While political differences may often be ascribed to more-or-less veiled self-interest, they can also be the result of genuinely different ideas. Factions may find themselves in conflict over such issues as peace with neighbors versus conquest, persecution of foreigners versus tolerance, the bounds of allowable behavior in public, or even something as trivial as traffic regulation or conspicuous consumption versus dull, sober dress and conduct.

Building Social Conflicts

Factional conflicts can be incredibly complex and can take players a long time to unravel, but they're not actually all that difficult to build. Really, all you need to do is pick a few sources of faction from the list and assign some relative importances. Those internal divisions may be well hidden, particularly if one faction is particularly powerful, but they will never be completely absent.

For example, take that fixture of fantasy and science
fiction gaming, the Evil Empire. We're all familiar with
the idea of a large, acquisitive empire run by an inevitably
dark lord, served by largely anonymous but very
dangerous soldiers. But what forces might be at work
within the empire?

Let's start by identifying where the dark lord gets his power. He's probably either a military dictator, deriving the bulk of his power from the fanatical loyalty of the troops, or an overwhelmingly powerful legislator and administrator. That may not sound like much, but if nobody is willing to go against the will of the courts or resist the tax collectors, the emperor can do pretty much what he wants, parlaying iron control into tremendous tax revenues and a large, loyal army. He may very well have magical powers in a fantasy campaign, but unless he's powerful enough to control everybody in his realm, people are afraid of him because he's a personification of the power of his troops or his authority.

So what potential factions might there be in the Evil Empire? Any large empire is likely to have some sort of regional or ethnic divisions unless generations of intense indoctrination have wiped such things out (extremely unlikely unless the evil emperors have access to cheap mind control). Perhaps different divisions of the iron-shod black legions are raised in different parts of the empire. Soldiers of IV Corps might think that solders of IX Corps are mincing cowards, while IX Corps will think that VI Corps are clumsy, stupid barbarians. Perhaps troops are from all over but only members of an aristocracy or residents of core provinces are made officers, leading to class as well as ethnic problems between troops and officers. Government officials may be assigned to posts far away from their homes to prevent conflicts of loyalty which might occur if they were called on to judge their own friends and families. Many historical governments experimented with this technique as a preemptive strike against kinship conflict, but it might lead to the region's residents becoming resentful of "foreign oppression" and ensures that the governor doesn't know the people and region he rules as well as the natives do.

Another point of contention might be a more ideological one. The typical evil empire is full of people who hate foreigners, but how do they express that dislike? Some may be in favor of a policy of expansion, crushing and dominating inferior foreigners. Others would champion isolationism, closing the borders and not polluting the empire with the blood of foreign scum, even as slaves.

The Power of Ambiguity

It's easy to built two or more "sides" for a society's political scene (say, secular military vs. religious government or urban merchants vs. rural noblemen). However, there are always more positions than there are apparent power blocks. This is where things get really interesting both in real politics and for PCs. Even in a society where all power is nominally in the hands of a single government or other organization, there's room for factions. This is because every organization, no matter how powerful, consists of individuals, and individuals don't always agree or get along together. This leads to two important rules to follow whenever you construct a society.

Rule Number One: In any group, there will always be divisions.

While people may be devoted to a common cause, they still have their own private ambitions, beliefs, alternate interpretations of doctrine, and other petty differences. These differences may be carefully concealed in an

authoritarian setting, but even the most apparently similar people will have disagreements: "Yes, we're all identical bowling-enthusiast space Nazi clones, but Klaus always struck me as being a bit too identical..."

Rule Number Two: Between any two groups, there will always be individuals with interests in common.

The king's chief minister, ostensibly a loyal cog in the bureaucratic machine, might have well-hidden sympathies with the rural lords among whom he grew up or well-hidden rural land holdings which might be hurt by the king's new taxes, putting him in league with his master's opponents. A legislator representing a suffering industrial world might have deeply seated religious convictions against the experimental arms facility which tax dollars might build there, leading him to make secret agreements contrary to the wishes of his voters back home. Such conflicts of interest may lead to a faction splintering or joining with other factions.

These personal and potentially faction-wide differences are a two-edged sword for PCs. On one hand, clever characters can take advantage of the divisions that exist in any power block, no matter how monolithic it may appear. Even if people are fanatically loyal to their rulers, those close to the centers of power will disagree with each other about how best to carry out their ruler's policy, while those farther away may not really know what those policies are. On the other hand, if PCs themselves become powerful and prominent, their underlings will be subject to the same divisions as any other group of people.

Conducting Factional Conflicts

When considering conflicts between factions, the GM may be tempted to think in terms of open warfare between organized groups. However, social conflicts almost always play out in far less violent and systematic ways. For all of their antagonism, opposing groups rarely regard their differences as serious enough to allow indiscriminate killing (or, at least, to risk their own lives in attempts to kill others). Rather, they're resigned to the fact that they have to live together regardless of their distaste for one another.

For example, armed peasant revolts have historically been extremely unsuccessful. A band of peasants might successfully ambush an unwary soldier or tax collector, but as soon as those in power can organize, the rebellions are crushed bloodily. However, peasants and rulers alike knew it was in their best interests not to let things come to that point. If a ruler kills his peasants, he will find himself without crops or tax income for years to come and the peasants will find themselves dead. As a result, open peasant-aristocrat fighting happened occasionally, but not often. Likewise, a secular ruler unhappy with the position of an important religious leader won't necessarily have him and his priests killed even if he has the troops to do so, since he might alienate everyone left alive. The policies of powerful leaders and groups must be a careful balance between exerting the power they have to get what they want and not galvanizing resistance, starting an expensive and difficult direct confrontation that they have no certainty of winning and much to lose even if they do emerge victorious.

Ongoing tension between ethnic, religious, or social groups will likewise play out as social "cutting" rather than fighting in the streets. They will charge each other inflated prices if they do business, go to different churches if they belong to the same religion, drink at different taverns, make up derogatory names for one another, and forbid their children to marry one another (adventure possibility: the PCs are Montague and Capulet servants, acting as go-betweens for Romeo and Juliet while still acting like enemies). However, less powerful groups are more likely to come out on the wrong end of riots and civil unrest. Groups suffering repression will call strikes (a popular weapon of disgruntled workers and peasants through history) and shirk the duties their oppressors heap on them. Only when a group is provoked or talked into it by a leader with more enthusiasm than good sense will open violence break out.

From time to time, factions can form political parties specifically to further their interests. Even in non-democratic societies, people may organize to support a particular political position, although their actions will be geared towards influencing rulers rather than gaining popular support. More often, however, existing organizations are used as rallying points. Members of an ethnic minority might use their church as a forum to discuss problems and organize actions. Most if not all members of the congregation are likely to belong to the same ethnic group, so the church, being a place

they all meet anyway, becomes a natural center for political activity. Members of a faction might instead join the same fraternity, go to the same bar, support the same sports team, attend lectures by a particular scholar or holy man, or otherwise use regular social venues as a means to communicate with one another and coordinate their actions.

In most cases, the older and more intense the rivalry, the harder it is to get beyond it. It is one of the exasperating facts of history that rivalries of long standing often take precedence over more immediate threats. Factions will often continue fighting one another in the face of invasions, plagues and natural disasters. Empires dealing with less sophisticated tribes and colonial powers expanding into new territories are usually smart enough to take advantage of this fact and play local groups off against one another. They may support one group or leader for a while, then another to keep any one group from gaining a decisive advantage, or they may support just one group with imported manufactured goods (for example, guns or rum) to the point where the supported group may have defeated all of its local enemies but has become completely dependent on outside aid. These tactics are depressingly effective and natives rarely see it coming until it's too late. After all, a distant empire is an unknown quantity. So far as the natives know, it might be made a friend or ally, persuaded to go away, or end up not being as powerful as it first appears. The blood-enemies next door, however, are a clear and present danger. They aren't going away, they can't be trusted, and they will attack at the first sign of weakness.

Kitsune

by Jared Smith, Mark Arsenault, & Jason Prince

The following material didn't make it into *__Usagi Yojimbo: Monsters__*, the new supplement for the *Origins Award*-nominated *__Usagi Yojimbo Roleplaying Game__*, published by Gold Rush Games. But Gold Rush has graciously provided this material exclusively for *Pyramid*!

In this *Pyramid* exclusive article, we present the crafty and mischievous fox-spirit for the ***Usagi Yojimbo Roleplaying Game*** (and all other *Fuzion*-powered games) . . . the kitsune!

Usagi Yojimbo RPG (Instant Fuzion) Stats

Physical 3, **Mental** 6, **Combat** 4, **Movement** 7, **Hits** 15, **Defense** 6
Skills: Bite 4 (1d6 damage), Evade 8, Perception 4 (6 with smell), Persuasion 4, Stealth 8, Tracking 5
Special Abilities: Enchant Creature, Illusions, Possession, Shape-shift

(Note: Stats for the kitsune for use with *FUDGE* and the new *D20 System* are included in the *Usagi Yojimbo: Monsters* supplement.)

Kitsune, or mystical foxes, are found throughout Japan. They differ from normal foxes in their shape-shifting ability and other magical powers, and their malicious and crafty nature. They appear as normal foxes, about three feet in length with a large bushy tail. Most kitsune have reddish fur with white highlights, though 1,000-year-old kitsune are thought to be pure white, with nine tails.

Kitsune live in the wild, in underground burrows, thick brush, or under logs. Kitsune who live near human communities sometimes build their dens in the spaces under houses. Female kitsune give birth once a year to a littler of anywhere from two to twelve kitsune pups.

Kitsune livers are believed to have powerful medicinal properties, and kitsune fur is valued by trappers and tanners. Inari, the Rice God and patron of rice fields, swordsmiths and merchants, is sometimes represented as a kitsune. Kitsune serve as messengers for Inari. Shinto shrines dedicated to Inari often have small statues of kitsune outside and around the shrine. Inari sometimes sends kitsune on missions for him, and may reward people who are kind to kitsune. Because of their association with Inari, kitsune are said to watch over rice crops, and are considered lucky by farmers. In general, however, kitsune are regarded with suspicion.

Kitsune have a large variety of magical powers. Kitsune can **Shape-shift,** sometimes posing as normal people to perform mischief. Female kitsune commonly transform into beautiful women to lure men, but other forms are possible. Some men have even unknowingly married kitsune, believing them to be beautiful young women. Children from this union are only born one at a time, unlike kitsune litters. Children from a union between a human and a transformed

kitsune sometimes gain some of the magical powers of the kitsune.

According to legend, a kitsune will sometimes place a leaf or other object on its coat as part of its transformation; when they change shape, the leaf (or other item) will turn into a child.

Kitsune also have the power to cast **Illusions**. Sample uses of this power include making a kitsune's den appear as a fabulous mansion, or day appear like darkest night.

Kitsune can also **Enchant** people, causing them to do the kitsune's bidding.

Younger kitsune are most often the ones most responsible for trickery and mischief. Older kitsune are more cautious when dealing with humans. Elder kitsune will make efforts to rein the younger kitsune, especially if threatened with attack by the humans. For example, if a hunt is organized by local samurai to rid an area of kitsune, an elder kitsune may approach the hunters and promise to make the younger kitsune behave themselves.

As kitsune age, they gain even more powers. When a kitsune reaches 100 years old, it gains the ability of **Possession,** controlling their actions or speaking with the victim's voice. This condition is known as kitsune-tsuki. Possession can be ended by a Priest or Monk exorcising the kitsune (see Exorcism earlier in this book). The experience often leaves the victim suffering from insanity for a time; sometimes permanently.

When kitsune reach 1,000 years of age, it gains great wisdom, its coat turns a golden color, and it grows eight new tails (for a total of nine). Such creatures are incredibly powerful and very crafty (+2 **MENTAL**).

Kitsune will attempt to have a general gathering of their kind once a year, presided over by an ancient kitsune (one 1,000 years old or older). These meetings are sometimes witnessed by humans (usually from a distance), with the kitsune appearing as dancing flames or wisp-like lights, which people call "fox fire."

Enchant

To enchant a person, the kitsune rolls a number of dice equal to his **MENTAL** stat. If the total meets or exceeds the victim's **MENTAL** stat x5, then the victim is enchanted. The enchanted person must obey the kitsune and believes whatever the kitsune tells them.

For example, a kitsune attempts to Enchant Taro, a strong but not-too-bright samurai retainer (he has a **MENTAL** stat of 3). The kitsune has a **MENTAL** stat of 6, so the GM rolls 6d6, totaling 25. Because 25 is more than Taro's **MENTAL** stat x5 (15), Taro is enchanted by the kitsune and under its control.

A new roll is made each hour, until the kitsune fails its roll and the victim escapes the enchantment, or the kitsune voluntarily releases the person. Kitsune often use this ability in conjunction with their illusions, and typically to cause mischief among humans.

Illusions

Kitsune can create realistic illusions of whatever they desire. This ability is often used to embarrass people (e.g., a merchant believes that a customer has paid him 100 gold coins when in fact they are really copper coins). The illusion appears quite real, and affects all of the applicable sense groups; for instance, an illusory bowl of soup would feel warm and smell like soup.

When casting an illusion, the kitsune rolls a number of dice equal to his **MENTAL** stat, recording the total. A character may spot an inconsistency in an illusion, however, on a successful **MENTAL** + **Perception** + **3d6** roll, using the kitsune's die roll total as the observer's TN. If the observer's **Perception** roll is successful, he is alerted to the fact that the image before him is not real, even though it still looks real.

Possession

When attempting to possess someone, the kitsune rolls a number of dice equal to its **MENTAL** stat. If the total of the roll is equal to or higher than the victim's **MENTAL** stat x5, then the kitsune has possessed them.

Once possessed, the victim is controlled by the kitsune like a puppet, even using the victim's voice to speak to others. The kitsune maintains its own **MENTAL** stat and memory, but uses the victim's **PHYSICAL**, **COMBAT** and **MOVE** stats, as well as any of the victim's Skills that are based on these stats, for as long as it possesses the victim. The kitsune does not gain the victim's **MENTAL**-based Skills, however.

While they are possessed, the victim's mind goes into a sleep-like state; when the possession ends, the victim will not remember anything that happened while they were possessed. A successful **Exorcism** performed by a Monk or Priest will force a kitsune out of a body they have possessed. (See *Usagi Yojimbo: Monsters*, page 12, for rules on **Exorcism**.)

Only kitsune 100-years-old or older have this Special Ability.

Shape-shift

Kitsune can change into the form of a person and back again. Each change takes one complete Phase, during which time the kitsune can do nothing else (except try to avoid attacks), and is at -3 to its COMBAT score.

Appearances

Fox Fire (UYCS #3). Usagi and Tomoe are walking through Geishu province when it begins to rain. They seek shelter in a nearby hut, which is also the home of a kitsune, disguised as a normal person.
The Inn on Moon Shadow Hill, (UY3 #31). Usagi seeks out an inn only to find that all sorts of other monsters are plaguing it.

Kitsune

Outfoxed (Adventure)

One evening, after a long day of walking or riding, the heroes come upon a large inn set back a short distance from the main road. The inn looks fairly new and inviting. With no other accommodations nearby, the characters decide to lodge there for the night.

If the PCs are reluctant to stay there, the GM may decide that rain begins to fall, the heroes hear howling wolves in the distance, that bandits are known to roam the area, or anything else that will help convince them to want to stay at the inn. The characters will be greeted by the servant girl, Umiko, a friendly Cat Servant, and her father, Goromasu, a Cat Innkeeper. The pair show them to their room (or rooms, depending on how many characters are present) and offer a hot bath to the weary travelers. Meals will be prepared, sake brought out . . . anything the characters desire, within reason. Overall, it is a very comfortable stay.

Suspicious heroes should make a **MENTAL + Perception + 3d6** roll, with a TN of 20. Those heroes who succeed sense that "things just don't look right" -- as if things are just a little too perfect. Any characters who roll 24 or greater will notice a bushy, reddish-brown foxtail underneath the kimono of the servant girl.

If the characters confront the innkeeper and his daughter, they will try their best to fast-talk their way out of trouble. Failing that, they will flee into the woods. If the heroes follow them, they will lose the pair after a short but merry chase, as the pair will turn back into their kitsune forms and hide in the underbrush (**MENTAL** + **Perception** + **3d6**, TN 24, to spot the hiding kitsune).

If the characters do not detect anything wrong, then they will go to sleep that night on comfortable bedrolls, under a warm comforter, with content bellies full of supper and sake. If any characters stay awake for "guard duty," one of the kitsune will attempt to enchant or possess them, in order to make them go to sleep also.

The next morning, however, they will awaken to a rude surprise! The characters wake up in the woods, on the ground. They will realize that they are laying in the exact spot that the inn was, near the road, but the entire inn and the staff are gone.

Those thinking to check their supplies will also notice that any money or valuables they had with them are also gone, as the kitsune made off with them in the night and sold or traded them off to a traveling merchant.

If the characters are set on recovering their items, the GM can have the characters encounter the traveling merchant on the road. Imagine the merchant's surprise when the heroes see their stolen goods in his wagon and demand them back!

The merchant could easily mistake the heroes for bandits or abusive ronin, or he may be completely understanding and give the items back to the heroes, saying, "It seems that everyone has been tricked by the pesky kitsune known to live in the area . . ."

Pyramid Pick

Hush Hush, the Sleeper's Sourcebook (for Unknown Armies RPG)

Published by Atlas Games

Written by Zach Bush, Andrew Byers, Michael Daisey, Gustavo Diaz, Tim Dedopulos, Kenneth Hite, Daniel Ksenych, Gareth-Michael Skarka, Rick Neal, James Palmer, Carlos Serra, Greg Stolze, Tim Toner, John Tynes, Chad Underkoffler

Illustrated by Toren Atkinson, Drew Baker, Moises Donoso, Matt Harpold, Richard Pace

Cover by Hive

126 pages; $19.95

Hush Hush is the latest supplement for the *Unknown Armies* game. It details the Sleepers, a watchdog group that works to keep the Occult Underground in line. For those unfamiliar with *Unknown Armies,* it's a modern horror game that takes a refreshing new approach to the genre specifically as well as roleplaying in general. Adepts practice a form of mysticism known as Post-Modern Magick which is based on the power of paradox (for example, an Entropomancer gains control over the universe by surrendering control of himself). Avatars can channel the abilities of powerful Archetypes like the Mother or the True King. Powerful groups like the New Inquisition and the Sect of the Naked Goddess struggle for dominance. The game background reads like Clive Barker channeling William S. Burroughs during a bad mescaline trip, but in a good way.

With all these powerful occult movers and shakers running around behind the scenes, you would think that the ordinary mundane world would be powerless before such people. You would be wrong. The only reason that the Occult Underground gets away with most of the things it does is because the mundane world is not aware that it exists. The metaphor given in the game is that of a Sleeping Tiger. All the adepts and avatars and secret societies are locked in a room with a big hungry sleeping tiger. They can attack each other all they want, as long as that tiger stays asleep. Once it wakes up, all the adepts and avatars and secret groups are just so much Asian Jungle Cat Chow. Wielding magical abilities is not going to protect you from a rioting mob of hundreds of panicked mere mortals. Kenneth Hite even provides a handy sidebar of events through history that illustrate the power of an angry mob.

The Sleepers exist to make sure that Tiger never wakes up.

Hush Hush follows the same format that other *Unknown Armies* supplements have. It opens with a creepy little story about an animated dog corpse that was written by John Tynes. The story is pretty good for game fiction, though I was spoiled by the vignette used to open an earlier *Unknown Armies* book, *Lawyers Guns and Money.* That set a standard that this doesn't quite match. Still, it is a lot better than most of the game fiction out there.

The first chapter gives an overview of the Sleepers and their history, with a bit of a surprise twist in their origins. The

chapter also lists each of the major players in the Occult Underground and whether or not the Sleepers see them as a threat. The one new interesting rule provided in this chapter is a section on determining the size and severity of a riot. It is an interesting method of determining the effects of a rioting mob when faced with high weirdness. Considering the way most Player Characters act, it would probably useful to adapt to other game systems as well.

The second chapter details the four major locations used by the Sleepers as well as their standard equipment. There are some interesting ideas provided, like the half-formed golem with the glass shards covering its body. Also scattered through this and the preceding chapter are eyewitness testimonials of how different people see the Sleepers. These sidebars are very well done and give an excellent idea of how creepy and threatening the Sleepers can be in a campaign.

The third chapter gives character descriptions for some members of the Sleepers. There is a sidebar on Authentic Thamaturgy (A school of magick that uses only ritual spells, not the book by Isaac Bonewits). The Cabinet members who rule the sleepers are all pretty interesting, I thought that Gerlinda Unger (who keeps taking over other bodies through the use of the Ritual of Union) and Sebastao dos Prazeres (who has been living in first his son's, and then his grandson's, body) were the creepiest. The rest of the characters were all relatively interesting, and any one of them could provide the spark for a game plot.

The last chapter provides several scenarios to use for a Sleepers campaign. I felt that this was the weakest part of the book. I would have liked to see some of the scenarios developed a little more. Some of the ideas were not especially interesting to me, but there were others that I loved. I found Showdown and Eat It All to be especially amusing.

All of the *Unknown Army* books have been worthwhile purchases, and this one is no exception. The system contains some of the best writing in the business, and the art has improved greatly since the core book came out. The Black and White illustrations serve to enhance the mood of the supplement. Since this is an *Unknown Armies* book, you also get treated to the photography of John Tynes, which manages to capture the feeling of the game as well.

Hush Hush is a great addition to an ongoing *Unknown Armies* game. It is also a good source of ideas for any high weirdness campaign, even if you are not using the *Unknown Armies* system. Either way, it is well worth the price.

-- Thom Marrion

Murphy's Rules

by John Kovalic

Murphy's Rules

Murphy's Rules

'. . . and a Happy New Year.'

Well, with the new year approaching (and the new millenium, if you believe in that sort of thing) come thoughts of the previous year. And I'd like to take a moment to address a couple of trends I've noticed in 2000 that I hope continue.

Affordable Electronic Gaming Material

From affordable miniatures options like [Microtactix's](#) excellent ***[Cardstock Buildings](#)*** line of printable miniature scenery and S. John Ross's line of [Sparks](#) TrueType Font miniatures, to free "quick start" downloads for games like ***[GURPS](#)*** and ***[Dying Earth](#)***, to actual supplements and adventures like [Wizards of the Coast](#)'s PDF conversions, there is more available, affordable, *good* material out there now than any time previously. And I hope the trend continues. It seems to be an excellent way to release new products that would be impossible to release in an affordable format on RPG shelves. It's also a great way to release product that would otherwise have been lost due to a line's cancellation (like *Alternity*), or due to the product falling out of print (like most of *AD&D's* 2nd Edition material). And, of course, the quick starts, rules excerpts, and extras are all great ways to introduce players to new games.

Personally, I'm *delighted* that I finally have another copy of ***Throne of Bloodstone,*** the only official TSR adventure ever designed for 100th level characters. Yes, it's cheesy, but it's also (in my opinion) delightful, goofy fun, and well worth the $2.95 for the download. And I'm fighting the urge to start buying the rest of my incomplete 2nd Edition collection through this means.

(As a random aside, I'm also pleased with how much better many companies have been about releasing errata for their games in the information age. My gaming has gone much smoother now that more timely attempts to fix and explain rules have been made.)

Quality Art And Layout

The year 2000 saw the bar raised for art, layout, and presentation of roleplaying products. Yes, I definitely prefer substance over style, but I won't deny that how a product looks influences how I experience it. There have been great accomplishments in the gaming biz this year, including: ***D&D 3rd Edition's*** art style, recent *GURPS* books presentation and art direction (*Ogre* and ***Bestiary 3rd Edition*** spring to mind), the art and layout of ***Big Eyes, Small Mouth 2nd Edition***, among many others.

Even smaller press items, like ***Orkworld*** and ***FUDGE Expanded Edition***, have seen remarkable leaps in their art and presentation. Most of today's RPG products wouldn't have been possible in an affordable hobby market format even five years ago.

I'd also like to offer a special side kudos to most of the makers of ***D20*** products. Most of the new material I've seen from companies like [Atlas Games](#) and [Alderac](#) has been really creative and innovative. (I love the affordable format of AEG's recent batch of small "narrow" adventures; anything that evokes a response of "Why didn't *I* think of that?" is okay in my book.)

In all, I've been happy with how 2000 has shaped up; lets hope the next year is even better.

And please, everyone, have a happy and safe New Year.

* * *

Speaking of holidays, you'll note that Dork Tower is taking a break this week. Given how John's the Hardest Working Cartoonist in Game Business (Where *does* he get 30 hours in a day?), we hope he gets a few moments to himself over the holiday. Happy New Year, John! And thanks for everything this year!

* * *

For all would-be writers out there: make sure you read our Writer's Guidelines.

Now, I'm sure this seems obvious. (Or, at least I hope so.) And for the most part our writers do okay. But a surprising number of our writers -- people from whom I've accepted and published pieces -- don't include sufficient information for us to pay them.

To summarize our guidelines on this matter:

Our default payment method is via check. If you don't tell us what you want, we presume you want a check.

In order to issue you a check, we need a Social Security number (if you're a United States citizen; if you're not, you need to let us know that, and we have some other paperwork you may need to fill out).

Now, we have lots of people who will send us an article with their address, without a payment method detailed, and without a SS#. This leads to a classic programming lockup, which means your article goes into the "Payment Problem" folder.

The "Payment Problem" folder (or, let's be honest and call it a "dungeon") is the folder I weed through and resolve whenever I have spare time.

I never have any spare time.

As a result, anything that ends up there isn't exactly resolved in a sprightly manner.

So, please, don't delay the untold riches you so richly deserve; make sure you include full payment info on each article you submit . . . .even if you've published a jillion articles with us (that way I don't need to track down your info). It will save us all potential trouble and heartache.

-- Steven Marsh

* * *

Last week's answer: Errata for ***The Autumn People*** for ***Changeling*** (as seen in ***Changeling Player's Guide,*** p. 188)

(Four stars) "St. Sollars the Twice=Martyred is standing in from of Castle Al-Amo, welcoming the PCs to the Seven Heavens."

A Noble Company of Conspirators

"His characters live in the worst possible moral universe: you're punished if you do wrong, and you suffer if you're innocent."
-- Lloyd Rose, on Stephen King's fiction

By default and design, this column traditionally takes a worldbuilder's viewpoint. It's about neat worlds, neat things to put in your world, neat theories to operate your world with, design guidelines both occult (kabbalah, sacred geometry) and theoretical (histories secret and alternate), scenery and Bad Guys and Cool Freaky Stuff. Occasionally we'll even go so wild as to dabble in plots and plot devices, especially plot devices designed by Nikola Tesla from the ancient Druidic blueprints beamcast into his mind by the orbiting Venusian saucers. But without characters to wreck, misuse, slaughter, and stumble blindly into it all, even the most cunningly-suppressed transmission is, at best, like a tree falling in the forest -- a cheap excuse to trivialize ancient wisdom. So this week, a look at those inconveniences, those meddling kids, those plucky gangs of misfits, those skunks in the woodpile of Antarctic Space Nazi global dominion -- the characters.

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition."
-- William Shakespeare, *King Henry the Fifth,* IV:iii:60-63

Before we start totting up modifiers and skills and Advantage points ("Hey, since this is a ***Suppressed Transmission*** game, is being Aleister Crowley's bastard daughter technically an *Unusual* Background?"), though, it might repay the GM to decide exactly what the characters are doing in this beautifully-crafted world in the first place. (Besides "messing it up.") What brought them to this pretty pass, and why? This question will set not only the opening scene of the game, but much of the tone of the first few sessions, and potentially the narrative structure of the whole story arc. In a conspiracy game, it's not necessary to decide on the Real Answer right away, but you should at least decide the one the players (or at least the PCs) believe, ideally before they ever touch those so-tempting dice. The basic possibilities (and keep in mind that these are far from mutually exclusive in Actual Truth) are:

- **UFO Attack at San Luis Rey:** The PCs just happen to be present where the world tears open. They're all randomly abducted by the Reptoids; they all happen to be at the K-Mart when the dimensional rift opens; they were all Confederate P.O.W.s when the Airship attacked the camp; they were the five people who followed the mirage into the desert during the Paris-Dakar road rally. This has the advantage of justifying any group of roughly contemporaneous characters as a player group -- why wouldn't a Navy SEAL, a 33rd degree Arch Mason, a tabloid reporter, and the world's leading genetic experimenter all be in the 7-11 the night the werewolves attacked? (And depending on how cute you get with that dimensional rift stuff, you can justify any character grouping from all of space and time yanked together by the Blue Bolt Of Lemuria.) The key here is likely to keep whacking the characters with stuff, now that they're "off the sidewalk" and part of the Secret Struggle. Even if the PCs know there's no connection between them, their Too-Subtle-By-Half Opponents won't believe it for an instant.
- **The Fiendish Backstory of Fu Manchu:** Because, nine times out of ten, it isn't true at all. These characters were patiently maneuvered together by the Conspiracy for its own ends -- housing loans approved, unit transfers authorized, the last can of Diet Sprite stolen from the lab -- all to get them together at the 7-11 at precisely 1:14 a.m. on that Tuesday of blood. A variant on this is the "reading of the will" or "mysterious patron" version -- they're all gathered by a Good Conspiracy to fight the Evil one and their own connection becomes the first secret for the PCs to unravel. (For extra fun, the "mysterious patron" can die before the PCs ever learn what his plan was.) The GM can put off figuring out exactly why the Conspiracy gathered the PCs together for a surprisingly long time; my favorite way is to keep creating links and weird synchronicities, and once the players come up with a really cool-sounding explanation, make it true retroactively. As a hybrid version, the Fiendish Backstory can work out by pure chance; each character happened to touch the Amulet of Leng at some point in its

existence, or some version of six degrees of separation can ensure that the PCs all know Aleister Crowley's bastard daughter (she dated a guy in the Navy, she runs a Masonic website, she's good tabloid copy, and she went to school with the geneticist).

- **Having Met At The Tavern, We:** Often, to get some handle on the game, the GM will ask the players to create their own linkages. Sometimes you get that "six degrees" thing, which again depends on the GM for the spark of unity. Other times, you can get a party with pre-existing cohesion: the crew of a tramp steamer, the members of a second-story gang, the family of an eccentric millionaire, the night shift at a K-Mart. Then, it's back to the first two setups: do these people stumble into Madness -- or were they pushed?
- **We're Ghostbusters, Ma'am:** The easiest way to do things, of course, is to have the PCs all be members of some group with an explicit mandate to go wading in High Weirdness. The Horatio Club, or PROJECT: BANQUO, or the Black Ops all get into plenty of occult messes; the one that leads to the bigger plot is the one you begin with.

"'What was the worst thing you've ever done?'
'I won't tell you that. But I'll tell you the worst thing that ever happened to me.'"
-- Peter Straub, *Ghost Story*

Building a PC for this kind of game is a kind of dance between the player and the GM. The GM needs a character who can tie into the plot and other characters, and who can respond usefully to the world. The first part is up to the player -- no moody loners who keep to themselves, no cowards whose reaction to threatening Blue Book officers is to move to Vermont and raise sheep. The second part is up to the GM: if a player desperately wants to build a character who is the world's leading Hungarian chef, there should be elements of Hungary or cuisine or (ideally) both in the big story box of the world. Thus both the players and the GM must work on hooking the PCs into the world and into each other; "player hooks" can link PC to PC or PC to world/NPC or (ideally) both. If the GM wants to conceal some element of a Fiendish Backstory, making the player write his character's resume (educational background, previous employment, job skills, hobbies and interests) can be a great way to do it. Remember, the Illuminati are everywhere: any military character can have a covert deployment to the Atlantean ruins (even if she just flew helicopters into Belize City), any scientist character can be secretly employed by the Network, any character with money can be in hock to the Gnomes of Zurich.

"In the end, of course, we remain puppets and our smiles are still painted ones. But now at least we have moistened them with our own blood."
-- Thomas Ligotti, "Professor Nobody's Little Lectures"

A conspiratorial, ***Suppressed Transmission,*** High Weirdness game makes an ideal "plot driven" game; there's a cunning plot that the PCs must expose. "Ghostbuster" characters can simply get a series of missions from higher ups until they're battling a Boskone sized conspiracy and saving the world by working up the food chain. For players who don't mind a little scripting, any of the other setups can produce the same thing, the old reliable story arc of investigation, discovery, reaction and climax. This much is pretty obvious. But this kind of game is also great for "character-driven" storytelling. Since (in theory) the whole world is weird, or conspiracy-powered, or whatever, no matter where the PCs go, they're bound to get into trouble. Either a compulsive world-builder or a compulsive on-the-fly GM can work this to her advantage -- the world-builder always has detailed writeups of what the Bad Guys are up to wherever the PCs are going ("Okay, the doorway blinks and you're in 16th-century Pusan, Korea. The hot-bun seller gestures frantically and says 'Thank Buddha you're here -- the mechanical men have almost completed their magno-gun!'") and the on-the-fly GM can just make something up that sounds cool (see previous example).

The key to making a character-driven game work is a clear character agenda. Either the GM, the lead character, or that old man in the tavern has to point the players in a direction and shove hard. A simple iterative game of "last tags" can escalate the PCs-vs.-Bad Guys fight and write its own script, with the PCs choosing how hard and where to hit each time. A GM with a yen for road movies can let the players meander around getting into trouble for the rest of the campaign. ("Well, that old guy sent us to the abandoned Air Force base where we met the surviving Martians from the 1938 invasion who told us about the Nazi cell in Disney World and when we busted them up we saved the Rhine maiden they held captive and she told us where the One Ring was and now there's Nazgûl everywhere and I'm sick of sticky rice.") Meanwhile, the GM with an ear for cultural-political particle physics can ring the changes on cause and

effect to create more drama that will, sooner or later, impact the PCs. The Martians have given the PCs up to the AFOSI interrogators, the surviving Nazis have fallen to the Templars who have become drunk with power, and the party of Discordians who were going to save the Rhine maiden are following the PCs for no good reason.

"We were the elite, do you see? There was no one like us in the world. Our minds and experiences were far beyond the streets and towns we found ourselves locked into. We were equipped like no one else to educate and direct this place, our home."
-- Sherlock Holmes, in *Planetary #13* by Warren Ellis

Once you've let the players drive things a little bit, let them co-create. It can begin small; one of your players, excited at the heady air of improvisational storytelling you created with that bit about the Rhine maiden, says: "Yes, the wounds on the body remind me of the murders of the Jakarta Ripper back in 1927. Fortunately, I know a man in Singapore who has the soul of the Jakarta Ripper's last victim preserved in a bottle of arrack." You, the GM, have never heard of the Jakarta Ripper, or that man in Singapore, or (if pressed) arrack. But here's why it works: the player is giving a hint ("I want to be a mysterious guy with connections just like all those cool NPCs") or two ("and I know a lot about Southeast Asia") that the GM can pick up and run with. Note that the player leaves areas of mystery for the GM to fill in; note that the good GM should always listen to her players. Especially if her players know cool things like that -- have the mysterious mentor ask that player's PC for his "expert input on the situation in Java as he sees it" and let the player build your world for you! Maybe he's "wrong" -- big deal. Even if you don't want to bisociate your way into what is likely a pretty neat setup, you can mine it for the Real Plan. "Yes, Commander Swift, you were close -- but you forgot about the Lemurian heritage of the orang-utang! Seize them, my orange minions!" Why should the players be the only ones who get surprises? Make their characters truly part of the game, and discover the Highest Weirdness allowable by law.